

LANCELOT BIGGS: MASTER NAVIGATOR *By...* **Nelson S. Bond**

fantastic

ADVENTURES

SEE
BACK
COVER

MAY
20c

The **WHISPERING GORILLA**

by **DON WILCOX**

**COMPLETE
STORIES BY**

ED EARL REPP

★
PETER HORN

★
**MILTON
KALETSKY**



Listerine likes nothing better than to FIGHT INFECTIOUS DANDRUFF

THAT should be good news to you if you have any sign of this condition.

That's the kind of a case Listerine Antiseptic really welcomes... the infectious type in which germs are active... in which inflammation and itching may be present... in which scales and flakes are a humiliating problem and relief seems far off. Then Listerine really goes to work, often giving amazing results which test cases clearly show.

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First Listerine gives hair and scalp a cooling and refreshing antiseptic bath. The scalp tingles and glows. Distressing flakes and scales begin to go... inflammation and itching are alleviated.

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Lambert Pharmaceutical Co., St. Louis, Mo.



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Fantastic

ADVENTURES

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VOLUME 2
NUMBER 5

MAY
1940



Lester Allison and June O'Neill boarded the strange ship for different reasons, but when it reared out into space, their problems became strangely intertwined. To what unknown fate were they being taken? Coming next month, another Don Wilcox super-story!



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Front cover painting by Stecken Mulford depicting a scene from "The Whispering Gorilla"

Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul

Illustrations by Robert Fuqua, Julian S. Krupa, Ray Jackson, Leo Meray, Red Roth, Joe Sewall

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

ONCE more the science fiction and fantasy readers of America are planning a national convention! Our readers may remember that last year they held such a convention in New York, with great success, even going so far as to gain national attention via two columns in *Time*. Well, they're doing it again.

According to Mark Reinberg, who sends us a letter about it: "... Plans and preparations for the coming Chicago 1940 World Science Fiction Convention are progressing excellently. The tentative date for this gala affair has been set at September 1, over the three-day Labor Day holiday.

"In order to make the proper arrangements, it is important that the sponsors of the convention, The Illinois Fantasy Fictioneers, and the convention committee, in charge of all details, know approximately how many to expect for the get-together. If you plan to attend, please drop a postal card to the address herewith. All inquiries regarding the convention will be promptly answered. News notes will also be printed from time to time in *AMAZING STORIES* and other publications devoted to science fiction.

"Your cooperation toward making the 1940 convention a success not only in numerical aspects, but in the publicity and better understanding it gains for the world of science fiction from the great American public, will be appreciated. Remember, Chicago In 1940! Chairman of the Convention, 3156 Cambridge Ave., Chicago, Ill."

To which we add: Go to it, boys!

WE introduce this month a new cover artist. He's Stockton Mulford and his first cover for *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* illustrates Don Wilcox's very unusual story "The Whispering Confla." This painting was executed in oils.

WE'VE all seen the familiar conception of the Grim Reaper with his ghastly grinning face, and his unbalanced scales. But now, in the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, scientists have actually succeeded in making Death visible!

This remarkable achievement has been accomplished by nothing more than the familiar photoelectric cell. Here is how it is used. Death is accompanied by a change in the tint of the skin from pink to blue. The change, however, actually originates in the blood with diminishing oxygen and therefore becomes noticeable only just before the end. But the electric eye, enormously more sensitive than our own, can see beneath the skin, and literally shows the color of Death creeping through the veins!

Already used in this way during operations, to warn when oxygen and stimulants need be administered, the photo cell is attached to the patient's ear like a tiny sentry watching for the first sign of deadly blood-color change.

Through the vigilance of this new device, so far as Death is concerned, "seeing is no longer believing."

TALK about Fantastic Adventures! Here's a real one for you. The wildest idea offered to the British Government during the First World War was a plan to freeze clouds solid! The amateur scientist claimed to have a chemical which would make this remarkable feat—er—easily possible. Guns could then be mounted on the

clouds to ward off airplane attacks! How about your fog, London?

NOW, in this new war, the British are getting more of this type of suggestion—but just in case somebody might "have something there" they aren't passing up any bets, but are giving each bareheaded idea the "once-over."

Among some of the more recent are a special type artillery shell. On landing it opens and releases live, venomous snakes (maybe to kiss the warlords, rather than boom them). Next is a huge beam of "dark light" to hinder night air raiders—by blacking out the moon! (Good night!) And best of all (this'll kill you!) is a plan to train cats to ride on torpedoes! Encoined behind a glass windshield (cats don't like water), the cat gazes fixedly at the target. A photoelectric cell, scanning the angle of pussy's head, corrects the course of the torpedo!

But don't leave the good old U. S. out of this screwy business! Patents have actually been issued on a gun with a curved barrel, which a soldier can fire from a trench without exposing himself. Another patent covers an arrangement of electromagnets to pull submarines to the side of a battleship. There the crew would be electrified by a current sent through the hull. But for us, we prefer the good old depth bomb. We don't want any magnets drawing every mine within ten miles right at us!

If the war keeps on, these inventors will put *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES'* imaginative inventions department on the rocks!

RECENTLY, two scientists, interested in solving scientific mysteries, asked themselves, "Why is the sloth so slow?"

So to Panama they went, gathered a few sloths, and proceeded to ask questions. First they timed the animals' speed in their normal upside-down pait along the underside of a tree branch, and found it to be one third of a mile an hour for two-toed sloths and 2/9 mph for the three-toed variety. (Our information is not complete on this subject, but we think the animals were timed with an alarm clock.) Next they discovered that sloths have an unusually low temperature—and felt they (the scientists) were getting warmer. So away from their shaded speedways on the undersides of branches the sloths were taken, warmed up a half dozen degrees in sunshine. And they moved 50% faster!

Similar results were obtained by injections of adrenalin and prostigmin, an intestinal stimulant—also (of course this is a less scientific method) by just scaring them! On one sloth who seemed built to stand it, the investigators tried all three methods at once. Irradiated, injected, and scared, the poor creature tipped out of sight at nothing less than a mile each hour. When last seen (though this report is not considered reliable) it was said to be doing the Dippy Doodle.

A NEW name comes to our contents page again this issue. It's Noel Gardner, who writes as his first attempt for us, "The Shining Man." And another name that hasn't appeared before in *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* is Milton Kaletsky. He's written fantasy before this, for instance in the April issue of *AMAZING STORIES*, and his current bit is notable because it will bring up memories of Olsen's famous "The Educated Pig." *RAP.*



"It's no use, Professor. Einstein's curved universe theory just doesn't apply to pretzels."

The Whispering

Screams rang out and the entire banquet hall was thrown into confusion as the Whispering Gorilla leaped across the table.



Gorilla By DON WILCOX

Even Steven Carpenter didn't suspect the incredible future in store for him because he knew too much about a man named Swangler.

THE night was foggy, gray-black. It was well past midnight.

A car sped down the dimly-lighted street, its motor quiet. There were three men walking along the sidewalk, and the sound of their voices was gay; one was laughing.

Tat-tat-tat-tat-tat. . . . The sound of the sub-machine gun rose over their voices, cracking out the sound of death. The three pedestrians fell for cover. Only one of them, Steven Carpenter, knew what had happened after that. He had watched the other two fall; it was the way they fell that sickened him. That and the blood that ran down the pavement, sticking to his clothes. . . .

2.

The usual morning hustle in the city room of the *Daily Telegram* was quieter. On half a dozen desks lay the morning edition. There was a picture there of two men lying dead on a pavement. A third stood by, his face tear-stained. The newspapermen who walked by the desks spoke little. Some of them had been to the morgue. The City editor had all three of his telephones off the hooks.

At the far end of the long room, the elevator door opened. Steven Carpenter came walking down, waved to the City editor, walked through the door marked: Private—Managing Editor.

Lavery, the Managing Editor, turned his chair to face Carpenter.

"Where's my wife?" said Carpenter. "What did you do with her?"

"Hid her. Got her out of town."

"What the hell for?"

"I'll draw you a diagram!" Lavery snapped, sarcastically. "Now you're getting out for awhile—while you can still walk out."

Carpenter faced him, his jaw rigid, a tall, thin man, his eyes bright. "I'm not going anywhere. And I want to know where my wife is."

Lavery stood up. "Shut up!" he roared. "I'm running this show. You're taking the next boat for Africa. Take a vacation."

"You can go straight to hell," said Carpenter. "I've got that munitions ring on the run. I know what they're after—war! And I'll keep at them. I'm no quitter."

There was silence. Presently, Lavery said, "Steve, I know that. I'm not asking you to quit. They got Hannigan and Forman last night, but they were after you. And last night they sprayed your apartment with bullets—trying to get your wife."

Carpenter started. "She isn't—"



"No, she's safe. You have my word on it. She's where no one will find her—not even you. Because you're going to Africa on game hunting assignment. That'll take one day a month. The rest of the time you can keep on with that series of articles you started. Take your notes. Mail the stuff in. I want you to stay alive, you and your family. Your exposé will explode things here. You'll come back in time for the explosion, just before election."

Steven Carpenter sank into a chair. He mopped his head. "Thanks, chief," he said. "Thanks for everything. But I'm not going to Africa."

"You'll be aboard the S.S. Congo in less than two hours."

Carpenter shook his head. "No," he said.

3.

The motors of the S.S. Congo sent a dull roar upward into Stateroom 44. A solid, subdued roar, fitting accompaniment to the hammering of typewriter keys. The freighter was out of the harbor now. Steven Carpenter lit another cigarette as he began his column.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Why was the S.S. Itaska reported to dock officials as being laden with harmless chemicals, when any stevedore on the loading job knew that the mixture of these chemicals would result in deadly mustard gas?

What was the real port-of-call of the American-owned and Panama-registered freighter Celeste, when she steamed out of the harbor with transport planes that require only two days to be converted to bombers?

Was it farm machinery in the holds of the U.S.S. Brockton when she sailed quietly at midnight last Saturday? Was it mousetraps? Or could it have been sixty thousand machine guns?

The typewriter kept hammering. The floor became littered with paper. The room was filled with a blue haze that lay like a cloud through which only fingers moved.

There was a knock on the door. "Come in," said Carpenter.

A sailor entered, carrying a tray. "Captain Forest's compliments, sir. He says maybe you'll want a sandwich and some coffee."

"Thanks," said Carpenter, rubbing his eyes. "Put the tray down on my bunk. And here—give these papers to the Captain. They're to go wireless immediately."

As the sailor closed the door behind him, Carpenter spoke aloud. "And let those dirty . . . direct—the bloody mess see how they like it!"

4.

"I DON'T like it," said the heavy man. "I don't like it at all. And I want it ended now." He had an iron-gray head, and his cheeks were puffy with good living. His little eyes roamed again over the hold type of the *Daily Telegram*, over the column, *QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS*. The cigar in his hand was unheeded as he faced the long table with the men

around it. Now he spoke.

"We've got things running well now. Soon, when it gets too hot to continue running contraband, we'll make our big move. But before that—"

"Anything you say," said a man near him, a gray-moustached, carefully dressed man.

"Questions!" the heavy man spat out, still looking at the newspaper. "Well, we've got the answer. Spangler—you say you know where this Carpenter went?"

"Had him followed right to the boat."

The heavy hand crashed down on the paper and the cigar crushed.

"Get him!"

5.

The deep, pungent odors of the jungle clung to the air, but there was something fresh in it. The faint breeze that cooled Steven Carpenter's face eased the heat a little. He rose from his hammock chair and strolled across the low, wide verandah. The door to the house had opened and the light fell out to the dusty road in a long patch.

"It's so pleasant here, Dr. Devoli," said Carpenter, "that I'm really glad the lodging houses in town were filled. It's so peaceful here near the jungle's edge. Let me thank you again for your hospitality."

Dr. Dartworth Devoli stood in the doorway, donning a laboratory apron. Taller even than Carpenter, the top of the doorway was just high enough to brush his fine white hair. His unwrinkled face and strong hearing belied his age.

"The pleasure is all mine, Mr.—ah—Fenton," Devoli smiled. "I wouldn't live anywhere else, now that I've acquired this little corner of the jungle for my own. It's both a home and a laboratory, and that's all in the world I want; that, and my work. But it is a welcome novelty to have a guest here, especially a man of your intelligence. Does your writing allow you to travel as you wish?"

"Not always," Carpenter smiled slightly. "This is more of a trip for my health. But your work—that seems fascinating, from what you told me at lunch. I've thought of it since. An article on your experiments—"

Devoli raised a hand, the sensitive fingers spread. "Please, not a word. Perhaps in a few years, after this generation of gorillas has developed. Let Plumbutter have a chance. After that—but I hear Plumbutter's voice." A low growl had issued from the laboratory building where Devoli kept his specimens, a voice at once sensuous and cruel. "If you'll excuse me," said Devoli, bowing. "I'm being paged—jungle style."

Carpenter grinned. "The moon seems about to rise. I believe I'll go for a walk. See you later, Doctor."

Steven Carpenter strolled down a winding path bordered by deep-scented flowers and delicate, dark ferns. From everywhere the myriad noises of the jungle came to him, a uniform stridency that negated itself into a clean silence. He stopped at the edge

of a clearing, silhouetted against the mammoth orange moon that edged over the tops of great trees. He was planning the next day's work. . . .

"Hello."

The man had come up so quickly that Carpenter had not heard him. He looked uncomfortable in the loose white clothes he wore, and the moonlight caught a jagged scar that ran from a corner of his mouth.

"Hello," said Carpenter, after a moment.

"Nice night," said the man, fumbling for a cigarette.

"It's a honey," said Carpenter.

"Got a match?"

Carpenter produced a match. In the cupped flame in his hands, the stranger's eyes took on a peculiar glint as he looked up at Carpenter.

"Thanks," he said. "Just wanted to make sure who you were." He backed away. There was a gun in his hand, and as he spoke, the gun flashed three times.

Steven Carpenter fell heavily, with three bullets in his heart. The stranger listened a moment to the echoes of his gun, and when they had ended, he ran lightly down the road.

CHAPTER II

A Gorilla Speaks!

THE English Captain put on his cap. "Thank you very much, Doctor. The Department won't forget your cooperation. If we'd had to take the body with us now, half the damned town would be awake. We'll be here first thing in the morning. The necessary autopsy can be performed by you at your convenience." He nodded to the Lieutenant, who motioned to several men in uniform. All of them turned to leave.

Dr. Dartworth Devoli stared at the body lying covered on a bench. "You were a fine chap, Carpenter," he said aloud. The table beside him was covered with papers: notes, letters, news clippings, pictures. "Two hours ago you were alive," the Doctor mused. "A fine, healthy man, with a good mind and a conscience, and a job that ended it all. And this lovely girl who was your wife . . . what will I tell her? They followed you all the way here, from a country where they needed men like you."

The scientist sighed deeply and blew his nose. "That's life," he said, quietly. "Here lies youth and vigor, dead—while an old man who scarcely knew him or his right name is the only one to mourn. An old man who has spent his years trying to approach making out of animals what nature gave you at birth. How wasteful . . . how tragic. . . ."

Devoli rose and pulled back the cover from the dead man's face. A ray of moonlight came through the shutters and lighted the dead, agonized features. "What good did all the fighting do you? Your brain was no stronger than your heart. When they stopped

that, they stopped everything."

But suddenly the aged scientist paused, and his hands trembled. "What am I saying?" he demanded of the empty room. "What am I thinking? Good Lord!"

His hands tore off the cover from the dead man. The blood from the bullet holes had clotted. For a moment the lithe, strong hands swept over the body. "Your brain, Carpenter! You were no more than your brain—but maybe . . ."

Devoli stood indecisive, his hands holding his head, his eyes burning. Then, swiftly, he rolled up his sleeves.

He placed the body upon a cot, rolled the cot over the threshold, through several rooms, into a half-lighted chamber. He touched a switch and a blaze of violet-white light flooded the room.

Now he scoured his hands in the deep white basin. The kettle that contained the surgical tools was boiling. The body waited upon the operating table . . .

Occasionally through the night the scientist would break away from his frantic work for a few seconds—long enough to listen to the soft rhythmic sluss-sluss-slus of the automatic blood pump. Now and then a slight adjustment of the control levers, then back to the operating table.

By the time he was ready to deposit a precious mass of tissue in the chamber of the automatic blood pump, the instrument was perfectly adjusted to the conditions of temperature and circulation necessary to keeping human tissue alive.

With a sigh of gratitude to his good luck, Devoli slumped into a chair. The sun was high. The caged animals were whining for their breakfasts. For minutes the white haired man sat there, heard nothing, saw nothing—nothing except the rhythmic sluss-sluss-slus of the automatic blood pump. He looked down at his scoured white hands, wondering at the miraculous surgery they had performed. The easier half was done.

One hand rested upon a small writing table. There was a pen, there was writing paper. He wrote:

My dear Mrs. Carpenter:

By this time you will have received my telegram informing you of the tragic death of your husband. I regret to inform you that it will be impossible, owing to conditions I cannot readily describe, to ship the body of Steven Carpenter back to you . . .

Now Dartworth Devoli paced back and forth before the cage of Plumbutter.

"This is the end for you, Plumbutter boy," he muttered to the unconcerned animal. Plumbutter chewed contentedly at a straw. "I've invested a lot in you, Plumbutter," said the scientist, as he prepared a large chloroform pad. "Now I need you—need your body."

Plumbutter yawned—a little painfully, for his throat was still sore from recent operations which the scientist had performed on his voice box.

Plumbutter was a four-hundred-pound youth of six years, a healthy, normal male gorilla. The scientist

had hoped that Plumbutter would eventually shed light upon the intriguing age-old mystery of animal intelligence. In recent months the finest of Devoli's surgical skills had gone into equipping Plumbutter with every physical property necessary for speaking with a human voice.

Time and again during these past weeks the white haired master had said to his dumb protege, "It's a certainty that you and your tribe will never develop real intelligence unless you learn to speak. As soon as I get your throat in shape, you'll have a chance that no other ape has ever had." For Devoli was convinced that human intelligence and human speech were interdependent; and what a sensational victory for science it would be if an improved speech mechanism would result in a higher grade of brain power in the gorilla!

But all of Devoli's fine aircastles for Plumbutter had suddenly shaken down to nothing in that strange moment of inspiration when the dead body of Steven Carpenter had been left at his door.

"I need you, Plumbutter," Devoli repeated. The husky gorilla grew drowsier with each inhalation of the chloroform. "I *think* the purpose is humanitarian," the scientist added, "though no scientist in the world can be sure of such things until he tries. . . ."

FOR several weeks after the operation Dartworth Devoli wondered whether his experiment had not been a dismal failure. But finally the springs of life within the animal began to take on enough vigor that the creature would creep about on his hands and feet and show an interest in food.

From all outward signs he was the same old Plumbutter with the same old jungle habits, old customary actions that he could have performed as well with no brain at all.

Then came the first indication of a change.

One morning the gorilla rubbed his great hands over his head, as if it were strange to him. His skull had been enlarged with borrowings from a foreign skull, and patched with silver plates, over which his own scalp had been tightly stretched. For almost an hour the creature seemed absorbed in stroking the furry dome above his ears, then he lost interest—if such simple behavior could be called an interest. It was simply a mechanical discovery on the animal's part, Devoli realized, and no proof that any consciousness had awakened in the new cortex.

There came a day when there seemed to be a symptom of growing curiosity in the gorilla—slight but perhaps significant. The animal showed a strong fascination for the mirror he held in his hand. Something more than the lively curiosity which any monkey exhibits—rather an agitated concern—even an emotional disturbance!

"Carpenter!" the scientist called. "Steven Carpenter! Listen to me!"

The gorilla grew attentive.

"You are Steven Carpenter! Do you understand?" The scientist clutched at the bars of the pen fervently. The animal stood motionless before him as if entranced by his words.

"You were killed, Carpenter, but I saved your brain. Gradually your nerves will straighten out and once more you'll be a living, thinking man—"

The enthusiastic words suddenly broke off. Unintentionally the speaker had run into the snag he meant to avoid—that word *man*.

He might have passed over the slip lightly had he been sure that the big hairy creature before him did not understand his words. But he was not sure; as a matter of fact—the gorilla behaved as if he had understood. He slowly lifted his great, leathery black hands, palms upward, and stared at them. Then he returned his deep-set, burning eyes to Dr. Dartworth Devoli.

The scientist edged back from the steel bars unconsciously. He was uncertain what to make of the gorilla's strange manner.

Now the animal clutched the upright bars with his great hands and pressed his bulky head close against the steel fence. His lips pushed together thickly, then opened to reveal his tongue between his chalk-white teeth. The tongue pressed at the roof of the mouth. At the same time the vocal cords gave forth a low hum. The scientist understood. The gorilla was speaking the word *man*.

"Your brain—it's working!" the scientist cried out. "You're Steven Carpenter! Steven Carpenter! Do you understand me? Your body was dead, but I've saved your brain—put it into a new body! *You can still live—and think—and be! You can be!*"

Again the gorilla studied his hands. His upright body drooped slightly, the huge head bowed, and the sluggish lips uttered a sound. It was a low, thickly whispered word, crudely pronounced but unmistakable.

"THAN-N-KS." The deep subdued boom of that single word made cills race along Devoli's spine.

Then as if the mental exertion had exhausted him, the gorilla lay down, a tired animal that wished to be left alone with his solemn thoughts.

The scientist capered about, pampering the beast with food and medicine, returning from his other duties every few minutes to study the mumbling lips.

Devoli tried to talk to him, to no avail. The beast simply stared off into space—or was he, by any chance, staring at that sprightly female ape two pews beyond?

Suppose, the scientist thought with sudden self-torture, that this prize achievement of surgical grafting should yearn for the jungle instead of civilization?

Suppose the animal instincts that dwelt within the viscera of this beast should prove more potent than the brain-stored memories of man. The gorilla equipped with the superior thinking machine of a man might decide to free himself from this prison and beat

his way back to the deepest jungles to become the king of all beasts.

Dartworth Devoli's concern grew as the gorilla's distant manner continued. . . .

Late one night as Devoli moved from gate to gate, stepping lightly so as not to disturb any sleepers, he came to the last gate, Plumhutter's own. He heard a soft tread from inside the fence. Suddenly a huge crusty hand came out of the darkness to clamp over Devoli's face and bind his head against the bars. A second husky hand slipped through the steel bars to snatch the keys. The lock sounded. The steel hinges sang a sharp note as the gate swung open, another as it closed. In the brief interval between those notes, the scientist and his prize specimen changed places. The lock clinked.

Devoli cried out, "Carpenter, in the name of human decency—!"

Perhaps the chance words were well chosen. The shadowy form of the gorilla receding toward the black wall of the jungle stopped. An arm swung, and the ring of keys whizzed through the air to fall somewhere within the pen that held the scientist prisoner.

Before Dartworth Devoli, groping through the blackness, recovered the keys and extricated himself from the pen, the sounds of the gorilla's footsteps melted away into the silence of the jungle night. . . .

CHAPTER III

Gorilla in a Stateroom

DEVOLI plodded back toward his house with faltering step. He reached the porch, slumped into the first chair, and there he sat for the rest of the night, his head in his hands, his fine white hair showering down over his slender fingers.

Sunlight and the call of hungry animals forced his stiff tired body into action. He stalked through the house, then suddenly stopped. An overturned chair arrested him.

His eyes flashed across the room to an open door, he flew to the storeroom where the suitcase of the late Steven Carpenter was stored. The suitcase was there—open! It had been rifled. The money was gone.

A knock sounded at the front door. Devoli looked into the grinning face of an American agent who lived in the nearby Congo village.

"Say, Professor, I just seen somethin's got your trained animals heat to a frazzle. Some guy made up like a gorilla—"

"You've seen my gorilla?" the scientist cried.

"Your gorilla? Hold on a minute. This wasn't no real gorilla, though this baby could pass in any zoo I ever seen. He came racin' down to the boat—"

"Boat?"

"Now let me finish, will you, Professor? Whose story is this? I said boat. Almost knocked me over the pier gettin' up the gangplank. You never seen so much excitement in your life."

"You mean they let him get aboard a steamship?"

"Couldn't stop him. Or if they could, they didn't want to. He was wavin' a fistful of hills big enough to choke the Captain. An' the Captain looked like he was chokin' all right. Guess there ain't no law against these vaudeville actors gettin' made up if they want to get what they consider publicity. But I thought I'd come hy an' tell you what you're up against."

Dr. Devoli sank to a chair. He was vaguely aware that his animals were screaming and chattering for food.

"Yessir," said the American, laughing, "with a fistful of hills like that actor was wavin', I wouldn't be surprised if they'd let one of them real animals outa your menagerie in the bridal suite! Coulda climbed aboard a chariot bound for Heaven, an' no questions asked. Them actors . . ."

THE steamship *Majestic* was two days out from the Congo coast, ploughing its course toward South America, en route to the United States. The weather had been rough, but it was clearing, and three stewards stood on the after deck, huddled by the rail. They seemed unmindful of the magnificent green swells of water through which the ship moved, or of the clouds that lifted from the horizon.

One of them reached into his pocket and brought forth half a dozen lengths of stiff, coarse hair.

"Now," he said, in a manner of one establishing a vital point in an argument, "what can you say to that? You'll have to admit he's some kind of animal, not a man. But he's trying to pass for a man, because he was clipping these hairs off his arms; I saw him through the keyhole. These hairs blew under the door."

"Haven't you gone in to see him, Joe?"

"No, thanks," said Joe. "Not since he growled at me that first time. I just knock and hand his tray through the door, and his big paw reaches out and takes it."

"Paw?"

"Well, hand—if you can call a claw as big as a platter a hand."

The three stewards sauntered down the stairs toward the stateroom in question.

"I'll bet he's a phoney, Joe—or else you are," one of the stewards jeered.

"All right," said Joe, half angered. "I challenge either of you to trade places with me and take him his dinner tonight. Go in and get chummy with the old boy if you feel like it. Which one of you wants to take me up?"

The challenge had a silencing effect. The subject turned.

"Does he eat like a man?"

"Eats three times as much as any human," said Joe. The words quieted to whispers. The stewards were before the stateroom door. Joe bent to the keyhole.

"There he is. You can see for yourself."

In turn the stewards bent for a keyhole view of the mysterious passenger. What they saw was a huge dark hairy head, the savage face turned toward them. "Don't worry," Joe whispered, never guessing that his whisper carried clearly through the keyhole. "He never sticks his head outside the door."

The stewards bent for another look. It was an impressive face, with powerful protruding jaws, a wide rubber colored nose like a human nose pressed down flat and magnified, and a massive bony skull that gathered over the ebony eyes in a heavy ridge. The gorilla showed his teeth.

"Grinning at me!" one of the stewards gasped. "Nuts—that's no gorilla. That's an actor, and he's part of that theatrical company we got aboard. He's all dressed up to get the passengers excited about the troupe."

"S-s-s-sh!" Joe whispered. "He's listening to everything we say."

"You think he can understand—"

"Sure, I thought you said he's just an actor dressed up—"

"He's no actor," Joe hissed. "He's the real thing!"

"Don't give us that, Joe—"

The stateroom door opened. The big rubbery face grinned complacently and a huge hairy arm reached out in an easy dignified gesture. The white uniformed stewards made white streaks in three different directions.

"J-J-o-o-e!" The soft booming voice reverberated through the corridors. The powerfully spoken word froze the three stewards in their tracks. Joe saw the huge crooked finger motion to him.

"Com-m-me her-r-re!"

Joe obeyed, retracing his steps gingerly. He stopped a few feet from the half opened door.

"Don-n-n't be-e-e afra-a-aid," said the gorilla. "Go-o-oh geh-tt me-ee the man-n-ager-r of the the-e-atrical-l com-m-mpan-n-e-e."

The deep soft husky whisper ceased and the door closed. Joe turned to the other stewards. "See?" he said. "Just like I said." But his voice had cracked, and he was as white as his uniform jacket. Then he went as fast as his wobbly legs would carry him, and the other stewards went their separate ways.

IN the salon Joe recognized the little, hot-eyed, black-mustached little man who was pacing around the table of card players: Roland Fuzziman, the troupe manager. Joe delivered the message with no explanations and left the dapper Mr. Fuzziman to do what he pleased about it.

Manager Fuzziman thought a moment. "One of my actors?" he repeated aloud to himself. "Room 44?" There were no members of his company there. But suddenly he brightened, corrected his tie. Undoubtedly a lady. An admirer, too discreet to speak to him publicly. Undoubtedly a beautiful lady. The smile lay broadly on his face as he walked down to Room 44 and knocked on the door.

"Com-m-me in-n-n."

Fuzziman almost jumped back to the other wall. He gulped, and as his shock receded, his professional, theatrical ear functioned again, because it still was ringing with the deep, soft tones that had answered him. There was a rich resonance and a certain breathy, thick enunciation that he couldn't readily classify among the dialects he knew. He turned the knob and walked into the room.

This time Fuzziman's gulp was distinctly audible. He stared a moment, closed his eyes, then looked again. But slowly, as he gazed at the four hundred pound gorilla, his manner changed, for Roland Fuzziman was a man who saw the world through eyes different from other people's. He blinked at the huge, hairy animal, strode up to it and slapped it on the chest.

"Say, buddy, you're good!" the little man exclaimed.

"Plenty good—in fact, damn good!"

He slapped the gorilla's chest again.

"Yessir, a very sturdy outfit, brother. Where'd you get it? Brehl and Brehl or Winklesteins? Any trade mark on it? It feels like the real thing."

Fuzziman began to feel around at the wrists and neck, looking for a trade mark. He couldn't even find a seam.

"Except for the head," Fuzziman cocked his own head critically, "that's the most convincing outfit I ever saw. The head's really too bulgy—but not bad."

The gorilla gave a low chuckle like an echo out of a cistern, and he bestowed upon the dapper little gentleman a wide grin full of even white teeth. His words came forth, slow, measured, deeply resonant.

"I wan-n-nt a job-b. Can-n you-u u-use me-e-e in-a pla-a-ay?"

The cocky little manager was still too amazed at this theatrical creation to answer the gorilla's question. For a few minutes he could do nothing but walk around the huge creature, sizing him up from every angle and praising his appearance to the skies.

"That voice of yours," Fuzziman raved, "how do you manage that deep down in the cellar effect? It sounds like tom-toms from the depths of the jungle. You say you want a job? My boy, you're the answer to a manager's prayers. I've got a play I've never used because it needed a man monster. With a little patching—change the monster to a gorilla—*h-m-m-m*! By the way, what's your past experience? Are you at liberty now? Where are you bound for? Any previous contracts standing in the way?"

The gorilla hesitated momentarily, and his answer seemed to be a deeper, more disturbing rumble, as if he had thought of something.

"On-n-l-e-e a li-t-tle un-nfn-n-nished bus-s-siness in-n-the Sta-a-ates," said the gorilla. "It can-n wa-a-ait."

Fuzziman fished two large cigars out of his pocket, placed one of them in the gorilla's teeth, and applied his lighter. The gorilla puffed heartily and blew smoke through the black nostrils of his flat nose.

FOR half an hour the manager smoked and talked; the more he questioned the gorilla, the more intrigued he became, and the more mystified. It was evident that the creature in the gorilla skin didn't care to lay all his cards on the table. Finally the manager put a pointed question:

"I'll check over that play tonight and see you tomorrow. How will I know you when you're out of that monkey suit? What is your name?"

"Jus-et cal-l-l m-e the gor-ill-l-la," came the slow reverberating answer. "I'l-l-l al-lwa-a-ays wear-r-r this-s cos-stu-um-m-me."

"Always? No, you can't do that. Whenever you'd try to go into a hotel or restaurant you'd have trouble. Women would jump out of their shoes. Men would call the police. No, you'd better—"

"I'l-l-l al-lwa-a-ays wear-r-r this-s cos-tu-um-me," the gorilla repeated.

Fuzziman studied the big hairy creature in awe. If this fellow preferred to be stuhhorn—

"It-t wil-l-l ad-ver-r-tis-s-se our-r pla-a-ay," the gorilla added.

"That's an angle! I'll let you wear it with a sign on your back. But still—you'll find it awkward traveling that way."

"That-t is-s why-y I wis-sh to-o pla-a-ace my-sel-lf in-n you-r-r car-r-re."

The little manager stood at the door, his mystified eyes still lingering upon his fascinating protege. This man, he thought, must be some sort of fugitive—perhaps a convict who had invented this clever means of hiding himself. Well, whatever he might be on the inside, Fuzziman liked his disguise well enough to take a chance.

"By the way, what is this unfinished business you mentioned? Revenge—or love—or—"

"Bo-oth," said the husky undertone.

The manager laughed. "You're all right, brother." He stepped back to give the gorilla a final slap on the furry chest and a pinch on the tough massive arm. "You'd be just one notch more realistic if you'd glue some longer hairs on your forearms."

The gorilla gave a rumbling answer and proceeded to crouch down on the floor. A sudden sickness had come upon him, owing to the effects of smoking the cigar.

Fuzziman, of course, never guessed such a thing. He went out with a head full of enthusiasm, tintured with puzlement. The gorilla's final gag, in answer to the suggestion of longer hairs on the forearms was a stunner that made Fuzziman champ at his cigar all the way down the corridor.

The gorilla had replied, "Hair-r-rs? I'l-l-l gro-o-ow them-m-m."

ON the final night before the S.S. *Majestic* docked in New York the various and sundry talents of the passengers were collected and displayed in a stage show down on the second deck.

The feature of the night's entertainment was a pre-

view of Manager Fuzziman's forthcoming stage play, "*The Whispering Gorilla*." From the instant that the bulky silvery gray-brown gorilla's head and shoulders appeared at the window of the stage set the audience was all eyes. And when the husky, soft whispered words began to roll forth in tones unlike any human voice ever heard, every listener was transfixed.

Three brief scenes from the play, then the curtain went down. The crowd went wild. The S.S. *Majestic* fairly rocked with the cheers and shouts of "Gorilla! More gorilla! Give us more!"

Fuzziman responded by staging one more short scene. Then followed curtain call after curtain call. Fuzziman brought the Whispering Gorilla back for a final bow, but still the audience wasn't satisfied.

"We want to see his face!" they shouted. "Take the mask off!"

Under the glare of footlights the dapper little manager turned to the dark hairy monster.

"How about it, fellow? Won't you give 'em a look at your face?"

The audience hushed to catch Fuzziman's words. The place was suddenly deathly quiet—so quiet that the gorilla's whispered answer carried out to every listener.

"But-t I haven't-t an-ny mas-s-sk. This-s is m-y own-n fa-a-ace."

The audience greeted this with wilder applause than before. But after the curtain had fallen for the last time, Manager Fuzziman still stood beneath the floodlights like a man paralyzed. His eyes were wide, and upon his reddened face the beads of perspiration stood out sharply.

CHAPTER IV

Rumblings by W. G.

THE telephone buzzed.

Manager Fuzziman strode across the carpeted floor of Suite 909, the most exclusive suite in the very exclusive Radcliffe Hotel, and picked up the receiver. "Metropolitan Press Bureau," said the voice.

"We're downstairs with the press clippings on the first month's run of '*The Whispering Gorilla*.'"

"Send them up!" snapped Fuzziman.

Fuzziman had been snapping at everyone that day, though he was by nature a gentle man. He walked back to the ivory table, sniffed at a box of cigars. Lighting one, he went toward the next room, from whence came the slow, painful clicking of a typewriter. Patient, crude strokes of heavy fingers.

Standing in the doorway, Fuzziman said, addressing the immaculately dressed and groomed creature at the typewriter, "You're working on that column of yours, I suppose?" There was no answer. "I don't like to keep talking about it," Fuzziman added, hesitantly. "I know you think it's none of my business. Only you're meddling with dangerous stuff. I wouldn't have minded a column of harmless chit-chat, but—"

"Please," said the gorilla.

Fuzziman sighed. "You're a person of peculiar talents," he said. "I hope they won't lead you to tragedy." His words seemed to stop the gorilla, for the huge animal stopped typing and stared at the wall.

"Tragedy?" said the gorilla. "Maybe I've seen it. Maybe—" but he was silent.

"All right," said Fuzziman. "You know I don't want to pry. But I did want to tell you that I've read your column every day since it appeared two weeks ago and I'm rooting for you. You're doing a great thing. They say you'll swing the whole election. I only wish someone else was doing it."

"Thanks," said the gorilla. The typewriter again beat out its labored tattoo.

"Slow going, isn't it?" said Fuzziman. "You ought to get a stenographer."

"If my typing speeds up as rapidly as my speech did, I'll be all right." The animal's voice had the deep, melancholy resonance of a pipe organ, but the words were cleanly articulated, and the speech was fluent. "And I can't trust anyone to know who is really doing this column."

"Maybe I could get Lavery, the Managing Editor of the *Telegram*, to supply someone you could trust," Fuzziman began, when the doorbell sounded.

Fuzziman went to the door and three bellboys pushed in, loaded with volumes that contained stacks of papers. "Take them right in to the table in the inner office," said Fuzziman, with a wave of his cigar.

The bellboys obeyed, advancing to the room from which the clicking typewriter sounded. Two of them got as far as the table. The third one was knocked down in the rush—a rush inspired by the sight of a monstrous animal sitting at a typewriter and turning around to face them. The stacks of paper swished down in heaps over the floor, and the three bellboys chased out of the suite in a near-panic.

"What? No tips?" Fuzziman smiled wanly. He returned to the inner room and helped the gorilla gather the mass of clippings. "They're still afraid of you," Fuzziman said. "In spite of your nationwide publicity in advance of that radio program you've signed for, and in spite of a month's packed houses on Broadway, they can't decide whether you're human or not."

"Can you?" said the gorilla.

At that moment the door buzzer went off again. Fuzziman gratefully tore his eyes away from the gorilla's penetrating gaze and went to the door. As he opened it, he found himself face to face with a tall, slender, white-haired man. "I'd like to see the person called the Whispering Gorilla," he said.

"You and ten million others," Fuzziman snapped. "How'd you sneak past the bouse detectives downstairs? This is a strictly private—"

The tall man pushed a hand out and kept the door from closing. "I've come from the Congo," he said. "I am a personal acquaintance."

"THE Congo?" said Fuzziman. A queer chill went through him. The tall man's manner was

strangely impressive. "What is your name, sir?"

The stranger did not answer; perhaps he did not hear, for his gaze was intent upon the door to the inner office. Fuzziman looked about to see the gorilla standing there in the doorway, statue-like, his knees bent but slightly, his huge head beld high above his immaculate white collar.

The gorilla advanced a step. The stranger rose from his chair, passed his fingers through the locks of white hair that sprayed over his forehead, as if appraising the creature's appearance. He looked and waited. The gorilla came to him and extended a leathery hand.

The furniture quivered as the gorilla spoke. "How do you do, Dr. Devoli."

"How do you do," said Dartworth Devoli, "Mr. Ca—"

The syllable was only half uttered when a steel pressure from the gorilla's hand stopped it. "Mr. Gorilla," the speaker finished.

Then the newcomer and the gorilla stood silently, looking at each other. Fuzziman couldn't make out what was passing between these two. He didn't like it. It made him think of strange things. Things that made his throat dry, that forced him to clutch the ends of his coat. He took a deep breath through his mouth.

"I'll take a walk," said Fuzziman.

"You needn't," said the gorilla. "Dr. Devoli and I will visit in my private office. Dr. Devoli, this is Mr. Fuzziman, my personal manager."

The gorilla took the scientist's hat, ushered him into the next room and the door closed.

"Well, Dr. Devoli?" said the gorilla.

"I've come to take you with me, back to the Congo," said Dartworth Devoli. "You are one of my—patients, you know. I owe it to you to—"

"What of your other patients?" asked the gorilla. "How were you able to leave them?"

"Only by suspending several experiments. I left an assistant in charge. I felt that my first duty was to you."

"Then I welcome you to stay here and continue your duty."

Devoli smiled. "Your brain is working well, I see." "Never better," said the gorilla. "Plumbutter's vigor was enough to enliven anyone's brain."

"Yes." The scientist's smile vanished. "Plumbutter's vigor is what I've been losing sleep about. You must come back with me. Live in my lodge. I'll give you every chance to get used to your new vigor—safely."

The gorilla's ebony eyes passed over the stacks of clippings, the typewriter, the yellow bulletin board where his first week's columns were posted. He got up and sauntered to the window and gazed out over the panorama of white skyscrapers. Devoli noted the lines of the well tailored black suit, and was surprised to see how much it did to correct the gorilla's misproportions.

The gorilla turned about, his long arms unobtru-

sively folded behind him.

"I had to come back to America. Believe me, Doctor, I had to finish my job." The floor seemed to tremble at his words, and his voice fell to a low whisper. "No one else knows what I've found out. An old friend of mine named Bradford helped me collect it, but even he hasn't gone ahead. And it's vital that this work continue."

"No work is more vital than the salvaging of Steven Carpenter," said Devoli.

"But don't you see, Doctor?" whispered the gorilla. "That is exactly what I am doing. Steven Carpenter found the international ring of munitions makers; he unearthed their method of shipping contraband cargoes to belligerents, while at the same time retaining the government's protection. Sooner or later they will contrive to have a ship of theirs sunk—and then war! War because a nation at war sank a ship carrying munitions to the enemy! And they'll take the country to war when they're ready for it! They're almost ready. The election is almost here. If the ring elected its puppet Congressmen, then staged a torpedoing—"

The gorilla pulled a sheet from his typewriter. "Have you read the column I write as W.G.?" he said, laying the sheet down on the table before Devoli. The aged scientist looked at it.

"Are all these things true?" he said quietly.

The gorilla nodded. "Every word. I've had to begin anew. Had I merely continued, my old editor might have become suspicious, demanded to meet me. As it is, with so much of Carpenter's material duplicated, he considers it an independent source with the same material. But he must never find out who I am, for he might beat a trail for others to follow."

Devoli sat silently a moment.

"Do you know whom you are fighting?" he said.

The gorilla nodded his great head. "I think so. Every shipment has gone through the hands of the North American Shipping Alliance." He paused, then said, "Would you call your experiment a success if I quit my responsibility to my people and my country—to assume the life of an oyster?"

DEVOLI rose and his hands trembled visibly. "If you stay here to fall, as Steven Carpenter and others fell, my life work will fall with you."

The gorilla hesitated. "Why are you so sure I'll fall?"

"Your gorilla instincts will let you down. I can't let you make this sudden plunge into civilization. Remember, from the neck down you're—you're full of primitive instincts that will control you. You're dangerous. In a pinch—"

The gorilla lifted a finger and his guest silenced. Sounds of knocking at the door of the outer office. A mutter from Fuzziman.

"It's all right," said the gorilla. "My manager is there to answer. You were saying—"

Devoli tried a new tack. "What of Mrs. Steven Carpenter? Does she know what has happened?"

"No," said the gorilla quietly. "No one knows but you."

"Do you intend to ever let her know?"

"Never."

"But—aren't you curious to see her? You must be." The scientist searched the expressionless silver black face. "Are you so strong—or so devoid of your old feelings—that you can resist the temptation to see her?"

"My manager often lets me drive about in his car."

The gorilla closed his ebony eyes slowly and opened them to gaze out the window. "I have already seen her—many times—but she does not know it."

Suddenly the private conversation was terminated by echoes of harsh talk from the front office. Contrary to the usual procedure, Manager Fuzziman was not doing his share of the talking.

"Don't give me that stuff. Where's this W.G.?" said a loud, snarling voice. "I mean the guy that's been writing that column."

"But there is no—"

"Then what the hell did the *Daily Telegram* send a copy boy over here for yesterday?"

"None of your business!" Fuzziman snapped.

"But it is our business," said the second voice, with a deadly calm. "We're exterminators, see? We come after an insect."

The first voice rang out: "Get the bell away from that phone!"

The sound of a table falling, then Fuzziman's choked cry.

The gorilla had moved halfway to the door, his arms reaching.

"Stay back!" the scientist cried. A restraining hand reached out and held his neck. "Let me go." And as the gorilla opened the door, the scientist bolted through and closed it behind him.

The gorilla, standing against the door, his breath coming in labored gasps, his hands tightly knotted as he held them clenched, heard what happened.

"Get away from that man!" Devoli said.

There was an instant's surprised silence. Then, "You're W.G.?"

"Suppose I am?"

"We're goin' to give you a little lesson in newspaper reporting . . ." The gorilla had opened the door and he could see Devoli facing him, and the two thugs, with their backs toward him as he walked in. Fuzziman was rising from the floor. ". . . where you gettin' that stuff you run? Is Lavery puttin' you up to this? How do you know so much about Carpenter and Bradford—eeeeeeff!"

The gorilla had taken the neck of each man in one of his hands and suddenly whirled them around.

"My God!" gasped the thinner of the two. "W.G.—the Whispering Gorilla!"

"Sit down, both of you," the gorilla boomed. "You're going to answer some questions." The two men, released, began walking slowly toward the settee which the gorilla had indicated.

But as they walked, the heavier man, his pock-marked face white, slid the hand away from the gorilla into the side pocket of his tan coat. Suddenly he whipped the hand out—and there was a gun in it!

Simultaneously the gorilla had flashed a mighty arm directly at his head. The heavy man flew off his feet and crashed into the wall. The ugly blue automatic in his hand spat flame. *Crack!*

"*Harry!*" the thin gangster screamed. "What did you . . . do . . . that . . . for?" He stood erect a moment, his hands fumbling slowly to his chest, where a dark stain was growing. Surprise alone lay on his face, and his eyes looked from one to the other. Then he crumpled up and fell limply to the floor.

The gorilla had meanwhile clamped his huge hands on the heavy thug. The gangster, bewildered, his eyes filled with terror, sat where he had fallen, still holding the gun.

The door burst open and two house detectives rushed in. "What's coming off—" The corpse stopped them. One of them went to the phone and dialed. When he finished, he said, "Homicide's on the way."

Both detectives were looking at the gorilla uncertainly. They knew he lived there, of course, but the sight of him. . . .

"Will you excuse us until the police arrive?" said the gorilla. He ushered the Doctor and Fuzziman into the next room. There he faced his manager and asked, "Did you send for a copy boy to come here?"

"Ye-es," Fuzziman said, haltingly. "Your copy was going to be late—"

"All right," said the gorilla, quietly. "It's too late now. Now the real identity of W.G. will come out. All the advantages of secrecy are over. We'll have to plan the fight differently, and God alone knows what they'll try next. There's hardly any time left with Election Day only two weeks away. *I have one ace in the hole that I've saved, but if I have to go to court . . .*"

Roland Fuzziman's eyes darted quickly to the gorilla's troubled face. Suddenly he remembered the gorilla saying to him, when he mentioned that no one could decide whether he was human, "Can you?" Somehow the question seemed important now.

Sometime later, when police, reporters, photographers had re-hashed the murder, re-enacted it a dozen times, Dartworth Devoli stood at the gorilla's side, placed a hand on the powerful shoulder, and whispered, "I'm staying with you till you see your fight through."

CHAPTER V

"W.G. for Congress!"

"**Y**OU are listening to the Whis-s-pering Gorilla." To the radio world that voice was like an electric magnet translated into sound. It figuratively reached out of the amplifiers to touch each listener with a gentle but compelling hand.

"Here it comes!" said "Sure" Peetson, fingering the jagged scar that ran from a corner of his mouth. He got up from his game of checkers and sauntered across the marble floor of the Carnation Club Lounge to the radio.

"And to think," his partner grumbled, "we been listenin' to that gorilla program every night, and *likin'* it up to now."

While the Whispering Gorilla theme song played, "Sure" Peetson reread the black headlines that had been folded in his coat pocket since afternoon.

"ATTACK ON GORILLA FOILED; ONE THUG DEAD!"

"Plot Against Mystery Columnist 'W.G.' Leads to Door of Famed Whispering Gorilla."

"Sure" Peetson's eyes lingered on the paragraph that described the accidental killing of Fragathorp. "Bunglers," he muttered. "The boss shoulda give me this job. I ain't had a break since I came back from Africa."

"You may get your chance yet," said his partner. Other persons who gathered around the radio were discussing the same matter in other languages. The frequenters of the Carnation Club Lounge were as cosmopolitan as a Geneva conference. The circle quieted as the theme song came to a close.

"Where's the big boss?" Peetson whispered. "Ain't he listenin' tonight?"

"He's in a stew," someone answered, "cookin' up something for the gorilla. He's got a notion he's the only one can handle this thing like it oughta be handled. Kid glove job."

"Kid glove! I could fix it with one bullet," said "Sure" Peetson.

The gorilla's voice returned to the radio. "Tonight, in place of our regular radio play, we bring you a short drama from real life which occurred today in the offices of my associates and myself. This re-enactment has been prepared by Mr. Fuzziman, my personal manager, who witnessed the invasion of the two thugs and the killing that followed. The comments are those of yours truly, the Whispering Gor—" *Snap!*

The gray mustached executive had marched across from an adjoining office to snap the switch. The Carnation Club Lounge fell silent. The big boss lighted a cigar.

Someone whispered to Peetson, "Get that paper outa sight, or he'll burn it up for you. He's been stamping out headline ashes all afternoon."

The gray mustached man paced in front of the silent group and puffed at his cigar. He began to bark.

"What the hell has this Whispering Gorilla got on us? Where does he get his stuff? Who is he, anyway?"

The dynamic speaker rested his glare on "Sure" Peetson. "You're all wrong, 'Sure'. This is no job for a gunman. If we'd known W.G. was the gorilla, today's fracas wouldn't have happened."

"I never said nothin'." said "Sure" Peetson.

"Well, see that you don't get any funny ideas," said

the big boss. "If that gorilla-actor got bumped off, the public might get stirred up enough to start investigating. Especially after the Carpenter business. So don't get any funny ideas."

"Let me remind you, Mr. Swangler," a well-dressed man with a foreign accent spoke up, "that a few tidy millions depend upon you—"

"I'll swing it, don't worry. In my own way."

"But these writings by W. G. are stirring up a very ugly temper among the people over here. What if our export syndicate should actually be investigated? Aren't you going to stop them?"

"Take it easy, Haefner. You'll get everything you want a month after the new Congress meets. Election Day is on top of us. I'll give you America wrapped in a paper sack. Don't forget that I can step into any office in America as Paul Swangler, millionaire investor and director of enough corporations to make you dizzy. My connections with this ring were never discovered by anyone—"

Swangler's eyes caught upon the sharp look of "Sure" Peetson, and he added, "Excepting one man, and he was promptly dispatched."

The circle of men became more comfortable. Drinks were passed, and the big boss clinched his impression of confidence by mentioning that he would release a few additional advance "dividends" that might be useful before election.

Before the group dispersed Paul Swangler gave a few orders. "Burgess, I want tickets to *The Whispering Gorilla*, the stage play, for the rest of the week. . . . Quaggy, you follow through on this Frag-atroph manslaughter case and make sure Frag and Motini never heard of the Carnation Club. The verdict will be accidental death. The Whispering Gorilla will get a world of free advertising out of the hearings, but don't mind that. Just now we're giving him all the rope he'll take, see? . . . Winterbotham, you keep up on Alan Bradford . . . And Peetson—"

"Yeah?"

"Check up on Steve Carpenter's widow."

"Sure," said "Sure" Peetson.

2.

THE chauffeur throttled down. Fuzziman hailed the crowds with his unlighted cigar, and in the rear seat the gorilla kept nodding automatically and waving the tips of his fingers at the window. Beside him Dartworth Devoll sat in an attitude of tension, his eyes on the gorilla rather than the crowd.

"Keep moving," said Fuzziman to the chauffeur. "We're due at the theater in ten minutes." He chuckled. "The next time I engage a gorilla to make sure he doesn't write for the newspapers. We've had a traffic jam every night since the killing brought W. G. out of the dark. . . . How's he feeling, Doc?"

The scientist turned the question to the gorilla. "How are you feeling?"

"Perfect," said the gorilla.

The scientist smiled and then grew sober. "If they

demand a speech after the play, as they did last night—"

"I'll give it to them," said the gorilla.

"You can't keep up this pace for long. You haven't slept for two nights."

"I'll sleep after election. As long as people want to stamp out the war cult I'll help them. Before I rest I'm going to get the exact dope on every man running for Congress."

3.

The scientist gave a resigned sigh. "It's a good thing Plumbhutter had a rugged constitution . . ."

The play ended with the usual uproar of enthusiasm. Two curtain calls, and then came the general cry of "Gorilla! Gorilla! Gorilla!" And as soon as the gorilla appeared, the cry changed to "Speech! Speech!"

"Thank you," the gorilla bowed. "I have nothing to say."

"Speech!" a voice called. "Tell us about the attack on you. Tell us where you stand in the election."

"This is not a political rally," said the gorilla.

"Why not?" a dozen voices rang out. A chorus began to chant. "We want W. G.! We want W. G.!" The whole theatre took up the cry. "Tell us what you think of the party platforms!"

"Give us the inside dope!"

"What's going on behind the conventions?"

The clamor kept up until the gorilla raised a hand. The theatre became quiet. "I cannot tell you more than my column does. There are forces among you who would drive us to war. These men control newspapers, they own Congressmen, they have unlimited power. They must be stopped! The people of this country do not want war! They must vote against the men who are intent on driving us into that war!"

Great cheers rang out. The darkness exploded with flash bulbs going off as photographers took pictures of the strange scene—an actor in a gorilla costume, holding a political rally in a packed Broadway theatre. People were on their feet. The gorilla couldn't be heard anymore. He held up a hairy paw for quiet.

"Each day in my column, run by the free press of this country, I intend to discuss the candidates for Congress and on the day before election, three days from now, I promise to run the names of every controlled candidate—and their backers!"

But suddenly, in the stillness, a man sprang up in the balcony and shouted: "The Whispering Gorilla for Congress!"

The crowd went wild. The whole auditorium caught up the cry and for five minutes the clamor ran riot. When at last the house quieted for the gorilla's response, the deep voice sent a tragic shiver through every listener.

"I thank you from my heart, but it is impossible for me to become a candidate."

A low murmur swept over the audience, then another man sprang to his feet and shouted:

"The Whispering Gorilla for Congress!"



There was utter terror on the man's face as the gorilla's huge paw grasped his throat

A rally ensued, during which Dartworth Devoli, shaking his head, led the Whispering Gorilla from the stage; the curtain fell. The rally carried on out into the street. Fuzziman's chauffeur drove through throngs all the way from the theatre to the broadcasting studios.

"Who were the men who made the proposal?" Devoli asked.

"I couldn't find out," said Fuzziman.

The gorilla said nothing.

CHAPTER VI

The Man with the Scarred Mouth

THE next morning there was a mob of people in the lobby of the exclusive Radcliffe Hotel. The management had called and told Fuzziman that the police advised them to allow the crowd at least to voice their opinions, to say what they had come for. Fuzziman spoke to the gorilla, and then he had called down to allow a few up at a time.

Now he and three receptionists, quickly hired from an agency, were busy with the people as they filed through the sumptuous room.

"No, Madam, there has been no acceptance to run for Congress. We are happy to have your support."

"Yes sir, the petitions are on the desk to your left."

"No, Miss, we cannot give out any statements at this time."

"I don't care who you are," Fuzziman was saying. "You can't—"

The tall young man persisted. "If you'll only tell the gorilla that Alan Bradford of the *Telegram* wants to see him—"

"Bradford?" said Fuzziman. He had heard the gorilla speak of a Bradford before. "Just a minute. I'll see."

The little manager pushed his way past the fringes of the crowd and let himself into the adjoining room. "Whew!" he breathed. "You should see them. They're four deep, and more coming all the time downstairs. You're going to be drafted for Congress, as sure as my name is. . . ." He broke off. "Now what did I come in here for? Oh yes. Do you know somebody named Bradford from the *Telegram*?"

The gorilla had been sitting quietly, a sheaf of papers spread out before him. Now he looked up. "Alan Bradford?" he said, nodding. "Yes, I've been waiting for him. Let him come in, please."

A moment later, the gorilla stood up to greet the young man who had entered the room. He offered his hand. "Don't be afraid to shake hands with me," he said. "I really want to shake your hand. I've

heard about your work. You were associated with—"

"With Carpenter and Hannigan and Forman."

"Yes. And since their deaths, you've done nothing?"

"You seem to know quite a bit about our activities," said Bradford.

"My business is knowing about others," said the gorilla, quietly. "Naturally, since I became interested in this work, I found out a lot of things."

"About North American Shipping Alliance, for instance?"

"Yes." The gorilla stood quietly. "You have news?"

"Rather vital news."

"And you've come to me with it?"

"I'm not sure. I don't know anything about you. I know what you've been doing, and I know that Lavery trusts you. That should be enough, yet I'm afraid."

"Of what?"

"What are you up to?" Bradford asked. "No one knows who you are. There are a million rumors about you. Why do you always wear this gorilla outfit? No man who was serious would continually—"

"I'm not telling you anything. Only this. I'm wearing this outfit for reasons that you'll never understand. Do you still doubt my sincerity?"

The young man was silent. "I've got to know what you'll do with what I tell you. It's too big."

The gorilla studied Bradford. "I see," he said. "You found out what ship they're going to have attacked and when."

Instantly Bradford was on his feet, facing the impassive gorilla. "You know that too?" he cried, incredulously. "It isn't possible!"

"I know a lot of things. I've known for some time what the Alliance was up to. I knew that when things got too hot for their racket to continue that they would play their ace—which is, to tell one of the belligerent's secret agents of a big contraband shipment, and then wait for the belligerent to torpedo it. There would be women and children aboard; we'd have another *Lusitania*—and war!"

The young man sat as if he had been turned to stone. When he found his voice at last, he said, "They've chosen the night before election—two nights from now—for the sinking. The ship is the U.S.S. *Commodore*. When the papers scream the news on election morning, every pro-war candidate will be swept in!"

The gorilla rose and took Bradford's shoulder. "Thank you," he said. "You've given me another ace. With this card to play, we can't lose."

"What are you going to do?" said Bradford. "You've got to run for Congress on this boom to write your name in."

"No," said the gorilla. "That's what my enemies want. They engineered this whole boom. They want me to run—and it's impossible."

"But I don't see why," Bradford protested.

"Trust me. There aren't many days left for us and I need your help. Come back later today and bring a stenographer, someone you can trust."

WHEN Alan Bradford and the new stenographer returned later that afternoon, the gorilla was very much engrossed in his work. He stood at his desk reading a badly typed draft of his column. On one side of the gorilla stood the erect, white-haired scientist; at the other shoulder was Fuzziman, his cigar tilted high, his eyes following the words as the gorilla read them.

Bradford and the girl, having disposed of their wraps, entered. The reading stopped. The paper fell from the gorilla's hand and slid to the edge of the desk.

"Our new stenographer," said Bradford. "Mrs. Carpenter, may I present the Whispering Gorilla."

"How do you do," said the girl.

"How do you—?" the deep voice faltered. The paper that clung on the edge of the desk trembled and slipped to the floor.

"And this," Bradford continued, "is Dr. Devoli, the Whispering Gorilla's private physician."

Devoli nodded as the girl greeted him. "The name was—?" His hand was half lifted toward the gorilla, his eyes were intent upon the girl.

"Mrs. Carpenter," Bradford repeated. "You've heard of Steven Carpenter?"

"Yes, indeed," said the scientist, his hand now trembling high upon the gorilla's back. The gorilla had bowed his head.

"And this is Mr. Fuzziman, the gorilla's business manager."

Fuzziman extended a cordial greeting which helped to loosen mysterious tensions that had suddenly gripped the office.

Roselle Carpenter stood before the Whispering Gorilla's desk. "Mr. Bradford said that I am to take my first orders from you," she smiled politely, "so what would you have me do?"

The gorilla did not answer. He seemed to try to answer, then he turned away. For a minute or two his huge form was silhouetted against the window and he seemed to be absorbed in studying the skyscrapers and canyons of the city. When he turned back he picked up the paper that had dropped to the floor. His voice choked down, but the girl understood from his gesture toward the typewriter that he wanted the paper re-typed.

Roselle Carpenter went to work. The gorilla returned to the window. And Devoli hastily left the offices for a cup of coffee.

Time passed slowly through the afternoon and evening wore on, and still the columns outside the door did not diminish.

It was past nine o'clock in the evening when Fuzziman rushed in breathlessly. "Where's W.G.?" he cried. Alan Bradford and Roselle Carpenter were eating sandwiches from a tray.

"He's in his bedroom, eating alone. Said he wanted—"

Fuzziman rushed past them, threw open the bedroom door.

Bradford and the girl, following him, saw the gorilla sitting on his bed, a huge tray before him. There was something horrible about the way he was eating, something that made the girl tear her eyes away.

"Shut that door, you fool!" the gorilla roared. The tone of his voice was primitive, brutal, a great hoarse sound that was inhuman. Bradford shuddered as the door closed.

Some moments later, it opened again. The gorilla followed Fuzziman, a still trembling Fuzziman, out. He was calm now, his face almost pleasant, and when he spoke, it was in the deep whisper that enthralled those who listened.

"Bradford," he said. "The eminent and famous Mr. Paul Swangler is outside. He wants to see me."

"Swangler!" Bradford leaped to his feet. "Do you know—"

"Yes," said the gorilla. "I know. That was my first ace in the hole. I knew what Mr. Swangler was up to a long time ago."

"What do you suppose he wants here?"

"I'm going to find out."

"How?"

"By seeing him. Remember, we have one advantage. He doesn't think we know who he really is."

The girl, who had been standing near the window, slowly rejoined the group. "Will you want me to make notes of the conversation?" she said.

"If you please," said the gorilla, not facing her. "Fuzziman, let Swangler in, please."

PAUL SWANGLER came walking into the room, a smile on his face. When his eyes fell on the gorilla, the smile faded a little, but he held it there. He took the gorilla's proffered hand unflinchingly. "I see the newspapers are correct in saying that you never take that costume off," he laughed.

"Cigar?" said Fuzziman.

Swangler silently took the cigar, lighted it. "I suppose you're wondering why I'm here?" he said. "I'll come to the point directly, and I would like you to do the same. I'm accustomed to quick action."

"Please proceed," said the gorilla, sitting down.

"In a nutshell, Mr.—uh—W. G. I've come to offer you my support for your campaign for Congress. I've been reading your column, and I've read your speeches, and I agree with you one hundred per cent. This country could use men like you. I admit frankly that I have a selfish interest in this. Most of my money is tied up in peace time industries, and war would hurt me tremendously."

"I see," said the gorilla.

An awkward silence fell. All eyes were on Swangler. "Every wealthy man owes it to his country," he said, pompously, "to see to it that the best men are elected to govern." In spite of his pompous address,

he had lingered significantly on one word. "Are you interested?"

"Yes, Mr. Swangler," said the gorilla. "Please continue."

"Thank you. Now, if I were to give you my support to the extent of, say, half a million dollars, which can be very useful in two days of campaigning, I would naturally expect to meet whoever is behind this movement."

"I'm sorry. I don't know what you mean."

"Come, come," said Swangler, jovially. "You know well enough. I mean, who writes your speeches? Who writes that column for you? Who supplied that list of 'controlled' Congressmen? I know well enough that you are—with all due respect—nothing more than the front for some organization, some man. Naturally, I must meet whoever is behind you."

"But W. G. writes it all himself—there isn't anyone!" Fuzziman burst out, before the gorilla's swift warning glance could silence him.

"Indeed?" murmured Swangler. "You know, I'm inclined to believe you." He rose to his feet and advanced to the gorilla. "I'm fascinated by your costume," he said, reaching out a hand. "I could swear you were the real thing if I didn't know it was only a costume. Do you mind if I feel it?"

The gorilla stepped back from the outstretched hand swiftly. "Yes, Mr. Swangler, I mind very much."

The words brought an electric shock to the room. Everyone tensed.

Swangler hesitated, then forced a chuckle. "Professional secret?" he smiled. "I'm not offended, and I'm sorry if I've annoyed you." He turned around, both hands outstretched in a magnanimous gesture. "Shall we draw up formal papers for my hacking?" he said. "You know, they always investigate these things. Let's keep our arrangement above board."

At a nod from Fuzziman, the girl left the room.

"It will be quite unnecessary for Mrs. Carpenter to bring back any papers," said the gorilla. "You see, Mr. Swangler, I have no intention of running for Congress."

"But my dear fellow—"

"I will continue to support those men whom I consider to be right. If you would care to lend your support to that, we can continue."

Swangler smiled. "Your modesty overwhelms me, but I am afraid that I must insist on your running personally. It isn't too late; your name can be written in."

"No." The gorilla said the word incisively, showing his teeth.

At that moment, Roselle Carpenter came back into the room, closing the door behind her swiftly. It opened a moment later and Dr. Devoli followed. "Mrs. Carpenter," he said, anxiously. "What's the matter? You turned as pale as a ghost. Did something frighten you?"

The girl stood still, trembling, visibly shaken. "It's

... nothing," she managed to say. "It's just . . . nothing."

Instantly Bradford was beside her. "What is it, Roselle?" he demanded.

The gorilla had come beside her. She faced Bradford. "It's foolish for me to be upset by such a trifle," she said, trying to smile. "I thought I was being followed."

"Followed?" said the gorilla. "By whom?"

"I don't know him. I saw him last night when I went home after shopping. This morning I saw him again. Now I thought I saw him outside."

"Here?" cried Fuzziman.

But the gorilla had thrown the door open.

AS all eyes turned to the adjoining room, the people in that room all turned to face those with the gorilla, but their eyes were all on the huge animal. There were dozens of people there, men and women of every description. As they looked at the cold, searching eyes of the gorilla, a hush came over them.

The gorilla was standing there, legs slightly apart, one arm on the door he had thrown open. There was something in his bearing akin to a beast about to leap.

Suddenly a nondescript man in a gray coat began to move. He had a long scar running from a corner of his mouth. "Let me out of here," the man mumbled, beginning to push his way.

The next moment a mighty roar echoed through the room—and the gorilla had leaped halfway across the packed room towards the fleeing man!

Instantly there was a panic. Screams rang out. The man in gray had gone mad. Clawing, shrieking, he was trying to get away.

"Stop! Stop!" Devoli was shouting, fighting his way after the gorilla. He plunged through the terrified crowd and seized the gorilla by the nape of the neck. "For God's sake, remember you're a man!" he whispered fiercely. The gorilla stopped suddenly. The next instant he was surging again, but the man in gray had fled.

The aged scientist bent close to the gorilla's ear. "Remember you're Steven Carpenter, for your wife's sake," he whispered.

The gorilla stood quietly. The scene in his mind—a moonlit night in the Congo, and a matchlight flaring up—faded from his mind with a great effort. Fuzziman was saying a few words to the frightened people still in the room as the gorilla silently followed Devoli back to the inner room.

Inside he stood once again in his impressively dignified manner.

"I'm sorry I—" the girl began. "I didn't think I would cause—"

Fuzziman came back inside. "What happened to you?" he said. "I've never seen you so angry before!"

"I don't understand," said Swangler. "That man came up in the elevator with me. He certainly looked harmless enough."

"If I ever see that man again, I'll kill him," the gorilla said. His voice was as calm and steady as a deep river. "With your permission, I hid you all good night."

He turned and walked into the adjoining bedroom. Those outside could hear the click of the lock inside.

"Well," said Swangler. "He certainly sounds as if he means it."

"I'm sorry you had to witness this," Fuzziman said to Swangler. "W. G. isn't an excitable sort, usually. I hope you won't think anything of it."

"If that man follows Mrs. Carpenter again," said Devoli, "his life isn't worth a plugged nickel. He better stay out of sight."

"You really think," said Swangler, in a low voice, "that he would kill that fellow?"

Devoli nodded. "He'd choke him in an instant."

Swangler laughed. "One would really think W.G. was a gorilla, to hear you speak. Well, I guess that's as much as I can accomplish tonight. If W.G. shows any sign of changing his mind, Mr. Fuzziman, please let me know."

Several minutes later, Swangler had gone.

THE others stood about for some moments until the gorilla's voice came from behind the door, muffled yet clear. "Fuzziman, you and Bradford take Mrs. Carpenter home. She's had a harrowing night. Bradford, did you get a good look at that man outside?"

"Yes," said Bradford, shouting.

"Don't shout. My hearing is quite acute. Remember that face. He was Swangler's bodyguard. Never mind how I know. Just keep him away. Good night."

Quietly, the two men and the girl put on their hats and coats and left.

When they had gone, the gorilla's lock clicked and he came out.

"How do you feel?" said Dr. Devoli.

"I almost lost myself," said the gorilla. "That man was the one who shot me that night in the Congo."

"Good Lord!" Devoli muttered. "No wonder you went off like that."

The gorilla sank into a chair, his hands over his eyes. "Did you see how frightened she was?" he whispered. His voice was shaky. "I'm dead, Doctor, and I've left a wife to be hunted by the lowest scum on earth. I can't lift a finger to protect her." He rose suddenly, and his bloodshot eyes gazed at Devoli. "You weren't here to see how repulsed she was when she caught a glimpse of me eating. You should have seen her face."

"Hold on," said Devoli, anxiously. He took hold of the gorilla's arm.

The gorilla buried his head in his hands. "I can't," he whispered. A great sob shook him. "I can't bear it. I love her so much. It's too much for a man to bear."

Suddenly the gorilla lifted his great head and laughed and the tears rolled down his silvery-black face. "*Man—I called myself a man!*" He faced the

Doctor with his legs apart. "Look at me, Devoli! You made me this! You made me live again—a monster! Why didn't you let me lie there? Why—"

"Carpenter!" the aged Doctor snapped. "Stop this! You knew what you were doing! You've work to do these next two days. *Carpenter*, listen to me!"

The gorilla stood there looking at the old man before him. "You call me *Carpenter*," he said quietly. "Thank you, Doctor Devoli."

He crossed the room and sat down. The Doctor brought him a glass of water and several pills, which the gorilla took unquestioningly.

"These will keep me from waking up during the night," said the gorilla. "But in the morning it will be here again. Do you know why Swangler and his crew want me to run for Congress? No? Because then they'll expose me—as a *real gorilla*! They're sure of it after tonight."

"But you're not running," said Devoli.

"No. Swangler came here tonight to find out if there was anyone behind me. Instead he found out I'm a real gorilla. His next move is clear."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said the gorilla slowly, "that the indicting of Swangler's thug for that accidental killing that took place here comes up tomorrow—and they undoubtedly have a subpoena waiting for me."

The Doctor's face turned white. "That's impossible! They'll challenge your identity—force you to prove who you are!"

The gorilla nodded. "Either that—or another way." Then he rose and went slowly back to his own room. "Good night," he said.

CHAPTER VII

Plot for a Victory

A DOOR closed gently and "Sure" Peetson stood before Paul Swangler.

"You sent for me?"

"Yes," said Swangler. "You know what today is?"

"Sure. Two days before Election Day. Today's the second."

"Fine. Now get out of town. Go up to Mattson's place in the mountains, and don't show up until after election."

Peetson's face clouded. "But, boss, I want to be around—"

"You heard me. Get going."

Paul Swangler watched "Sure" Peetson close the door behind him. He stepped to a phone and dialed a number. "Hello, Stetley? Swangler. Yes, the subpoena was served on him at the crack of dawn this morning. No, I can't be there, though I'd like to be around to watch the fun. Right. Tomorrow's the day he was going to publish that list of Congressmen we own. He'll be up in the Bronx Zoo by then. Do I really think he's a gorilla? I'll be damned if I don't! Sounds insane to me too, but wait till you see what

happens in court today. Certainly. There'll be no list tomorrow, and there'll be a fine Election Day the day after that. Call you after it's over."

Then, smiling to himself, Paul Swangler put the phone back and sat down to the breakfast that waited for him on a silver tray.

The corridors of the Court of Special Sessions were packed. Somehow the word had gotten around that the gorilla was going to appear. Early in the morning, the streets around the court had been roped off. The area was dense with newspapermen, though it was a routine appearance against a criminal that was going to bring the famed gorilla to the court.

Or was it? Hints had circulated . . . big doings . . . startling developments. . . . The crowds waited impatiently, wondering.

Cheers rolled down the street when the gorilla's car came into sight. One could see him sitting there with his manager on one side, and a distinguished old man on the other. The car drove up to the great stone stairway that led to the court and stopped. The police cordons battled the wild mob for gangway, and the shouts rang out.

"Lookit him still in his outfit!"

"You tell 'em, W.G.!"

"Give it to the crooks, hatter!"

The photographers clustered around, impeding progress with their pleas for the gorilla to pose. The gorilla posed patiently, silently. His face was grave, as were the faces of the men with him. Presently they began walking up the long stone steps.

"Say something to us, W.G.!" the shouts rang out.

The gorilla turned. "The newspapers will say everything I have to tell you tomorrow," he said, his voice deep and booming, and amidst great cheers he resumed walking.

Police ushered them through the corridor into a small room to one side of the courtroom, to wait until the gorilla would be called. Inside, Fuzziman sank to a bench, while the gorilla stood, his eyes on the floor.

"What are you going to do?" Fuzziman panted.

Devoli held up a hand. "You've asked the same question a thousand times this morning. Let him alone."

"I'm quite all right," said the gorilla, slowly.

"Did you get the money, Fuzziman?"

"Ten thousand dollars in cold cash," said Fuzziman, plaintively. "Had to get the bank president up to get it. What's it all about?"

"Soon," said the gorilla. "Soon enough. Thank God Election Day is only two days away." He said nothing more until the policeman came to call him. Then he rose and walked into the courtroom, with the two men behind him.

A sound like water rushing up on a beach greeted his appearance in court. Half the spectators stood, the better to see him, and the gavel rapped imperiously. "Order in the court! Sheriff, see that order is restored!"

The judge's eye swung back to the gorilla. He turned to the District Attorney. "Mr. Attorney," he said, "is this the witness for the State?"

"It—he is, your honor," said the District Attorney. "But he has requested that he be left out of the case. Mr. Roland Fuzziman is here on my subpoena, and he is quite capable of presenting the State's case."

"If it please the Court," said a man, rising from one of the tables in the enclosure, where the gangster sat, shifty-eyed, "that gorilla has been subpoenaed by the defense."

"Do you intend to have this—uh—person testify on the stand?"

"I most certainly do, your honor."

"In that case, the Court requests this person to remove his ridiculous and abhorrent costume at once."

Now the wave of talking and comment that rose up drowned out the gavel. The gorilla advanced to the bar and waited for the noise to die down. At length, when the sheriff had ejected half a dozen spectators, and order was restored, the gorilla spoke.

"Your honor, what if I do not choose to remove my costume?"

The judge leaned over. "Do I hear you correctly, sir? This Court has ordered that you remove that costume at once. Please give your name to the clerk."

"I must refuse," said the gorilla quietly.

The judge rapped down on his bench. "This Court is quite aware of your theatrical and political activities, but it cannot countenance an effort to reduce this Court to a laughing stock. Unless you obey my order immediately, I will be forced to hold you in contempt."

"I have no alternative," said the gorilla.

"Are you quite aware of what you are saying?" said the judge. He adjusted his spectacles, and his voice was softer. "I know the fight you are waging is a good one, but I cannot approve of your methods. Please consider your answer carefully."

"Your honor," said the gorilla in his magnificent voice. "The furthest thing from my mind is the desire to cause any undue sensation here, or to obstruct justice in any way. But there are other kinds of justice, and I have fought for my own kind more than I can tell you. I cannot explain why it must remain impossible for me to comply with the order of this Court, but I can tell you only that it would ruin everything I have worked for. I must therefore accept your decision to hold me in contempt."

The judge nodded his head in a mystified manner. "You are a very courageous man," he said, quietly, "in your own peculiar way. I hold you in contempt because I have no other alternative."

The attorney for the defense sprang to his feet. "I must protest! I demand that the witness the defense has summoned here be forced to testify!"

"You demand?" said the judge quietly. "The Court has already demanded. If the witness chooses to be cited for contempt, there is nothing more."

"But I protest against this outrageous—"

"Sit down!" the judge snapped. "It is quite within the ability of this Court to hold even a defense attorney of your fame for contempt!" He faced the District Attorney. "Call the sheriff to hold this witness."

The gorilla spoke up. "If it pleases your honor, may I press upon the understanding of the Court to grant me immediate bail?"

"I protest! I most emphatically—"

"Sit down! And shut up!" The judge glared at the defense attorney. He turned to the gorilla, his voice altered. "Bail granted. Five dollars, and I remand you to your own custody until further notice from this Court. Please pay the clerk. And now, please get on with this hearing!"

"Thank you, your honor," the gorilla murmured. He turned to Fuzziman. "When you're through here, you'll find me at the hotel." Then he was gone.

PAUL SWANGLER had barely finished his leisurely breakfast when the phone rang. He walked over to it and lifted the receiver, then listened.

"What? You blundering idiot! You let him get away—you damned fool! You—" Viciously, he slammed the phone down, his brow furrowed. Immediately the phone went off again.

Gingerly, Swangler lifted it. "Yes, I heard," he said, after a moment. "No, it isn't over yet. Stop crying, Stetley. I promise you that column will never appear. Of course I can still stop him. It's my last trick, but it can't fail! Now sit down and relax. I'll get to work right away."

Swangler pressed the receiver button down, holding the phone in his hand meditatively for some moments. Then he lifted his hand and dialed. He spoke. "Is Joris there? Swangler . . . Joris? Listen, get up to Mattson's place in the mountains right away. Peetson's on his way there now. Get him and bring him back to town. Got that? Bring Peetson back to town without fail!"

Swangler held the button down and dialed again.

"Hello, Rollins? Swangler. There's a change in plans. The Victory Dinner is coming off tonight instead of tomorrow night. Did you hear what I said? I don't care what you have to do. Hire two dozen planes if you have to, but have them all there tonight. I want every one of our candidates there, understand? Senators, Representatives, too. What's it all about? Can't you guess? What do people hold Victory Dinners for? Victory! Tonight!"

Now Paul Swangler replaced the receiver and sat down again. A slow smile spread on his face and he murmured to himself, "Peetson, you're going to give you all for the cause tonight." The smile didn't fade.

CHAPTER VIII

Discovery and Loss

WHEN the gorilla returned to the Radcliffe Hotel, he found the crowd already forming. He pressed

his way into the private elevator that went to his suite, then past the people in the outer room. In the inner room, he found Alan Bradford and Roselle waiting.

"Then it's true!" the girl exclaimed. "Dr. Devoli called—said you hadn't testified after all!"

"Yes," said the gorilla slowly. She hadn't looked at him when she spoke, he had observed. The gladness was in her voice, but not in her eyes.

Bradford came forward. "What do we do now?" he said.

"I'll call you in a few moments," said the gorilla. "I want to be alone while I collect my notes. I'm going to dictate my pre-Election Day column in a few minutes, and I want you to be around to add what you can. No, don't leave. Stay here; I'm quite content to stay in my bedroom."

He tried to smile, then thinking how horrible a grimace it must look, he quickly stepped into the bedroom. Then he sat down before the mirror and looked at himself for several moments. "Lord," he breathed, spreading a hand over the eyes he was forced to close. He shook his head and stood erect. "In a few days it will all be over," he said to himself. "And then?"

But he erased the thought from his mind. He opened the drawer of his desk with a key, fumbling as his huge fingers strove to move the little key. Then he arranged a sheaf of papers before him.

For several minutes he wrote with a great pen that stood nearby, each sentence a painful effort. His huge head was a study in concentration as he worked. Then he laid the pen down and seemed to be listening. His immeasurably sharpened sense of hearing had caught fragments of conversation from the next room. Now he went to the door and stood close to it.

"It's a beautiful day outside," Bradford was saying. "Real fall weather. In a few days we'll be able to enjoy it like normal people. As soon as W. G. blows this business up."

"Alan," said the girl. "What is he going to do after that?"

Silence. "I don't know. I've thought of it."

"Alan, who is he?"

"I don't know. No one knows. He's just . . ."

"Just what?"

"Don't ask me, Roselle. You know as much as I do. You saw him that day when he was eating like some—"

"Like an animal."

"Yes."

"Alan, do you really think he is?"

"I don't know, I tell you. Not even Fuzziman really knows. Did you see what happened to him when he tore after that man who was following you? Fuzziman trembled all the way to your home; couldn't talk either. I wish I knew . . . no, I don't! I don't want to know. It frightens me. It isn't possible."

"But Dr. Devoli—he must know."

"Maybe he does. He whispered something to *him* that night, but I couldn't hear. It was the only thing that quieted him."

"I noticed," said the girl. "There was only one man

who ever fought for me that way—the man I loved."

"Steven," said Bradford. "The finest man I ever knew. But, Roselle, he wasn't the only man who loved you. Roselle, I've thought about saying this to you for weeks, but I know it must take a long time for a woman like you to get over losing the man Steven was."

"Much more time, Alan, please," said the girl, her voice barely audible.

"So I see," said Bradford. "I thought I realized, but maybe a man can't feel these things like a woman. But I love you, Roselle."

The door leading from that room to the front one closed as Bradford left. After that there was silence, and only the girl's weeping could be heard.

THE gorilla sat down again. There were great tears in his small eyes, and a sob choked in his throat. His great black fingernails bit into the rough flesh of his palms, and he lay his head on the desk and wept. He lay that way until Dr. Devoli silently entered the room.

"Carpenter," the Doctor whispered, "you need all your strength now. You outwitted them this morning. Now we're almost finished. I know what you're suffering, man, but you've got to hold on a little while longer."

The gorilla turned away. "I'm all right," he said. "Go out and talk to her. She's feeling miserable. I've got to end it. Send Bradford in to me."

When Bradford came into the bedroom, the gorilla kept his back to him for some time while he spoke. "Bradford, get this down: The North American Shipping Alliance is owned by Mattson, Stetley and Swangler, through proxies. In three months, exactly 853,000 tons of contraband have been shipped on illegal permits. Among the contraband has been poison gas, machine guns, bombers, grenades, automatic rifles, trench mortars, tanks, scrap iron. On my desk you'll find complete lists. Beside it is a sheaf of affidavits from the proxies with sworn testimony that they have been paid to hold title to shares really owned by three men; also, testimony from the foreman of the Newark warehouse, testimony from—" and there the gorilla stopped.

Bradford waited expectantly. He had left the door slightly ajar, and through it came the sounds of Devoli and the girl speaking. Bradford looked closely at the gorilla's ear. A shiver swept him as he realized that the ear was twitching as it listened to the conversation.

"Dr. Devoli, I've been wanting to ask you something. Are you the same Dr. Devoli that wrote me a letter once . . . from the Congo?"

"Yes, Mrs. Carpenter, I wrote you a brief letter at the time of your husband's death."

"Why have you never mentioned it?"

"I—I thought perhaps the hurt was still too keen . . ."

"You must know that I loved my husband deeply?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then surely you realize how much I've hungered for word of him—even though he is gone. Why haven't you told me?"

"There wasn't much to tell. I'm sorry to say that I was so busy with my animals during your husband's short stay that I had little time to talk with him. Had I realized what fate lay in store for him . . . but there's no need to say that now. I remember distinctly how often he spoke of you."

"What sort of things did he say?"

"He wished he had brought you with him."

"Yes, he wrote me that . . . I wish I had gone." She was crying again.

"Close the door!" the gorilla whispered. He had turned to face Bradford as he spoke, and he was shaking. His eyes were more red-rimmed than usual, and his hands were closed fists.

Bradford closed the door, eyeing the gorilla. "What's the matter?" he said.

"Nothing. I'm not myself today. Maybe you'd better go for the day."

"Today?" said Bradford, his eyebrows lifting. "Two days before Election Day? With all that vitally important material to be—"

"I can handle it myself. Take my car. And take Ros—Mrs. Carpenter with you. It's a beautiful Fall day outside. Take her for a ride. You can both use the rest. . . . What are you staring at?"

"**N**OTHING," said Bradford. "Nothing but that paper clip."

"What about it?"

The gorilla's eyes went to the paper clip, then back to Bradford.

"What about it?" he whispered.

"Nothing," said Bradford. "Yesterday I watched you sharpen pencils. You held one between each pair of fingers and sharpened them that way."

The gorilla had come very close to Bradford now.

"I'm thinking," said Bradford, his face ashen, the words coming from him as if by torture, "that of all the men I ever knew, only one ever fastened papers with the clips on the side, instead of on top—and only that same man held pencils in his hand in that way—and that man was Steven Carpenter!"

The gorilla's hand shot out stiffly, gripping Bradford by the throat. The huge arm pushed him against the wall, and a thumb and forefinger pressed against his windpipe. Bradford's body shot backward. His legs whipped over a chair that clattered to the floor. He stood pinned against the wall, unable to struggle, helpless in the grasp of the great animal that held him there.

The gorilla held him like that for ten seconds. Then he let his hand relax and breath rushed back to Bradford's lungs.

"Steven Carpenter is dead," said the gorilla, his eyes boring into Bradford's. "Never forget that you know that. I saw him die."

Still unable to speak, Bradford nodded his head.

He brushed a hand up to his eyes. "I understand, W.G.," he managed to whisper.

The gorilla helped him to his feet. "I'm sorry," he said. "Do as I said. Take her for a ride. Help her to forget. I know your friend couldn't have prayed for a better man than you. Now go—I've work to do."

Later, when Devoli came in, the Doctor said, "What happened in here? Bradford looked ill when he went out. And you don't look well either."

"Nothing," said the gorilla.

"You didn't lose your head again?" said Devoli anxiously. "You're getting to a point where you go off easily. Remember what I told you at the beginning, no matter how much it hurts: from the neck down you're a brute."

"Only from the neck down, Doctor?" said the gorilla, gently. "Have you ever taken a good look at my face?"

The Doctor looked away. "You're a long way from the Plumbutter whose face I knew. I'm worried. Deeply worried."

Then he went out and left the gorilla to his work.

IT was late in the afternoon when Alan Bradford came rushing into the gorilla's room. His clothes were torn, his face was cut in several places. "Roselle!" he cried. "They've kidnapped her!"

Instantly the gorilla leaped to his feet. "Who?" he roared.

"I don't know. They ran into our car out on Long Island, forced us out with guns and took her with them. I fought, but they knocked me out with a gun butt. When I came to, I was lying on the side of the road with a crowd around me. I didn't wait for the police and came here. There was a note lying on me when I got up. Here it is."

The gorilla's heavy fingers fumbled with the paper until he threw it down on the desk with a loud cry of frustration. "Open it! Read it!"

Bradford read: "Don't worry. Nothing will happen. Just wait for our call later in the day."

The gorilla stood as if transfixed. "This is Swangler's work!" he shouted, the veins on his great neck standing out. "I'm going to kill him!"

The rage stood out on the animal's face, and his mighty arms swung up as if to come with force enough to shatter everything in sight.

But just as he moved toward the door, the telephone rang.

Swiftly, Devoli stepped over and took it. His eyes were fixed on the gorilla, one hand upraised in warning. "Hello," he said. "This is Dr. Devoli. Yes, Mr. Swangler, we have your note. Just a moment, please."

Devoli spoke to the gorilla. "Are you man enough to talk in a civilized fashion over this phone? It's Swangler, and you'll have to be calm."

The gorilla snatched the phone from the Doctor. Then he held it away at arm's length, while his breath came less rapidly, and the hair on his neck, which had

seemed to rise, settled down.

Then the gorilla spoke. "This is W. G." He said nothing else until the end, when he said, "We'll be there. If anything's happened to her, I'll tear you to bits with my hands." And he hung up.

"She's safe?" Bradford cried.

"Swangler says so," said the gorilla. "He says he only took her to persuade us to come to his Victory Dinner tonight. He says that Roselle will meet us there."

"I don't understand it," said Devoli, watching the gorilla as he began to pace the floor. "But whatever it is, I think we can be sure that she's safe if Swangler says so. Until tonight, there's nothing we can do."

But Bradford had caught the Doctor's glance.

"There's a lot we can do," he said. "And we'd better do it. That list, for instance, and those names. Come on, W. G. After all, I'm sort of fond of the girl too," he added wanly.

The gorilla looked up at him and shook his head. "All right," he said, and walked into his bedroom.

Only Devoli stayed behind, his white forehead furrowed in thought.

CHAPTER IX

Death Comes to a Party

"THEY must be about all here now," said one of the bellboys near the door of the Carlton House. "What a bunch. I bet this is the biggest party even this hotel ever saw. All these Congressmen and millionaires."

"There's one I know," said another bellboy. "That's Senator Green. And down there, that smooth-lookin' bird, that's Paul Swangler. Ain't that Swangler, copper?"

"Hell, yes," grinned the cop. "That's him. 'Scuse me, lads. Here comes the main treat of the evening."

The policeman joined several others going toward the door of the hotel. Outside the scream of many sirens was growing as it approached. The sounds echoed down the canyon-like streets.

Around the corner sped four motorcycles, the policemen on them riding like centaurs. Up to the Carlton they swept and the sirens died. Behind them a long, black limousine drew up. The door opened and three men stepped out. Last of all was the gorilla. The four began to go through into the hotel.

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated one of the bellboys. "It's W. G. himself!"

"The main treat—I'll say!" said another. "He's about the only guy that's missing so far. Who are those other guys?"

"Damfino!"

The gorilla walked through the lobby and a hush followed him as people caught sight of him. His huge face was composed and his eyes looked straight ahead. Like the three men with him, Bradford, Devoli, and Fuzziman, he was immaculately clad in full evening

dress, and he was an arresting, majestic figure.

At the entrance to the Grand Ballroom, Paul Swangler came up to the group. The men bowed politely and went past Swangler inside.

There, standing not far away, with several men around her, stood Roselle Carpenter! She was radiant in her gown, a deep old rose velvet. She hastily excused herself and came up to meet the men.

Every eye seemed to rest on the little group as they stood there.

"Did they hurt you?" the gorilla said, his voice low.

"No." She was actually smiling. "They were very nice to me. They sent someone over to my place for my clothes and took me out to dinner." Her gaze rested on each of the men, lingered momentarily on the gorilla, but he was looking out over the assemblage.

"All right," said Dr. Devoli. "Now that you're safe, let's get out of here. I don't like this one bit."

"Not so fast, Doctor," said the gorilla. "Let's look about here. We've got the columns all set up and ready to go, but we may pick up a detail or two here."

"I agree," said Bradford. "This is a Victory Dinner, but it's our victory. Let's stay."

"I don't like it," Fuzziman spoke up. "It's cock-eyed. Why should they invite us here tonight? And wasn't this scheduled for tomorrow night? There's something going on here that I can't put my finger on."

"We'll stay," said the gorilla. "I'm going to find out why Swangler wanted us here so badly that he kidnapped Ros—Mrs. Carpenter to get us here."

The orchestra began to play at that moment. Bradford murmured something to the girl, but she laughed and shook her head. "No, Alan," she said. "I'm going to have the first dance with—W. G.!"

The gorilla turned slowly to the girl, his eyes full upon her. "Thank you," he said quietly. "I don't dance."

"But you must," she insisted, coming closer. "I'm asking you to."

The gorilla caught Devoli's glance from the corner of his eye. He could almost feel the Doctor wincing. His heart was beating furiously, his breath caught. "Of course," he said.

He advanced and took the girl's hand in his own. She put an arm around him, and they danced out on the floor. If everyone had been watching the group before, now they stared openly. As if by some magic, photographers appeared everywhere, and flash bulbs began popping. People stopped dancing to watch the strange couple, and everywhere the conversation followed them.

BUT the gorilla danced. He was awkward, his feet wouldn't do what he wanted them to, but he danced. And as he danced, the vision in his arms spoke to him, and laughed, telling him little things that had happened that day.

And slowly, a great anguish grew in the monster's

breast, and a rage tormented him. This woman was his wife. Had he lived, his life would have been spent thus, always in her arms, always beside her. The love he had always had for her burned a thousand times more fiercely now.

By the time he had finished the dance, his brain was on fire. The queer fancies he had begun to spread. How hazy everything was. He wandered out of the hall and into one of the lounges, and there Devoli found him. "Are you all right?" the Doctor asked.

"Devoli," said the gorilla. "Look at me. Am I really so hideous?"

"Not to me," said the Doctor. "I've grown so accustomed to you that I scarcely see you. I see only the being underneath."

"Thank you, thank you!" the gorilla cried. His voice was uneven, husky.

"What's the matter?" Devoli said, anxiously.

"I've been thinking," said the gorilla. There was pain, unbearable pain, in his eyes. "What if I actually told Roselle who I—"

The Doctor held a warning hand up to his lips. His eyes sent the gorilla's gaze past a wall of potted flowers that separated the lounge from the one adjoining. Bradford and the girl stood there, close together, their conversation very low.

"It's impossible for you not to eavesdrop, with your hearing," said Devoli. "Let's go before you hear some-

thing you'll be sorry about."

The gorilla started walking. "We're too late," he said, choking. "I heard it." He was aflame inside. But he had to conceal it. He had to.

When they joined Fuzziman, Devoli took the little manager aside.

"Roland," he said. "At the first sign of anything funny, get bold of W. G. and don't let go. I'm afraid. I've never seen him like this. He's all worked up to-night."

"He's not the only one," retorted Fuzziman. "Look over there." He moved his chin to indicate a small group of men who were facing them. "You know what's looking at us now?" he said. "About a hundred million dollars. That's Stetley, the fat one, and next to him, the small man, that's Mattson. And those other babies are no paupers either. They got a lot to laugh about, but I wish they wouldn't do it right in our faces."

"Tomorrow night at this time," the gorilla broke in, "we'll be doing the laughing."

"Don't underestimate them," cautioned Devoli. "Look, the dinner's going to begin."

Liveried servants were standing at the entrance to an adjoining dining hall, and as four deep-toned chimes sounded, the guests were beginning to pour through the doors. In a moment Bradford and the girl appeared and the little party began to move forward.



Every eye was on Roselle Carpenter as she put an arm around the gorilla and led him out on the floor to dance.

Paul Swangler himself waited for them. "We've allowed you complete freedom up till now," he smiled. "But from here on, you're our prisoners. You may not know it, but W. G. shares the guest of honor seat tonight."

"You're too kind," murmured Devoli.

The guests of the evening were too well bred to stare too openly as the party took their seats. Famous names and famous faces were beginning to feel a little put out at their total lack of appeal beside the sensational W. G.

The dinner began quietly enough. Halfway through the first course, Paul Swangler, seated as Toastmaster, near the gorilla, rose to his feet. Five hundred banquetters turned to him.

"We are gathered tonight," he began, "to celebrate the victory of our Party—a victory which will be ours within forty-eight hours. There have been those of us who have felt doubts about our ultimate success, but tonight those doubts will vanish. For, as one of the guests of honor, we have here tonight a nationally famous figure. I refer to the Whispering Gorilla, for lack of a better name—and where indeed might I find one?"

General applause and polite laughter broke out.

"You will be surprised and pleased, I am sure," Swangler continued, "to learn that our victory has been assured by the presence of our guest of honor—rather, by the presence of both our guests of honor."

Many of the guests exchanged wondering glances. Swangler was speaking in riddles. Devoli was frightened. The gorilla was restive, his bands trembling.

"Do I make myself clear?" said Swangler. "But I am afraid I do not. The Whispering Gorilla promised us a rather gory bit of news in his tomorrow's column. Many of us were perturbed at his threats. Does not his presence here signify otherwise? Perhaps not. But let me introduce our other guest of honor, to clarify matters—"

The gorilla was rising, a low growl in his throat.

Swangler waved a hand to the guards at the entrance. The door opened and "Sure" Peetson walked in!

He was dressed in ordinary street clothes. He stood confused a moment, looking about the vast room, as if he had wandered in accidentally. He started to turn around and walk out, when he heard the pounding footsteps.

"Stop him!" Devoli cried. Fuzziman had leaped up and tried to halt the gorilla, but he was cast aside like a toy. The gorilla was running straight toward "Sure" Peetson!

Now Peetson saw him, took in the whole scene at a glance, saw Swangler—and understood in one paralyzing instant. "Swangler!" he screamed. "That's why you brought me here—for him!"

FIVE HUNDRED people recoiled as the scene unfolded. . . . The Whispering Gorilla shedding his veneer of civilization and turning animal . . . the jungle

beast stalking, running toward his kill . . . bounding . . . and suddenly the screams rang out. . . .

Over the wing of a table the gorilla vaulted, barely touching his knuckles. His flying black tails made him look like a monstrous bird, a monster from hell. Now Peetson began to run—too late! The gorilla had seized him about the throat . . . police were rushing up, guns drawn, bewildered, afraid to shoot . . . people fainting . . . chairs turning over . . . men blanching.

And over it all came a blood-freezing cry from the gorilla, a cry from deep in his chest, higher each instant, insane with blood-lust.

The gorilla stood for an instant with the body of the screaming gunman in his huge arms, then he whirled, leaped over a table and out of a balcony window.

As he had run past his friends at the table he heard them cry out to him. "Don't—this is what Swangler planned for you!" but it had had no effect on him. Now as he stood on the balcony, seeing the street below, he wanted to dash the body he held down. But he didn't. Swangler had wanted him to. He wanted to kill. The moonlit night in the Congo, the matchlight—all of it came back now to the gorilla . . . the door opening and Roselle seeing the way he was eating . . . dancing with her an hour before . . . all of it lost.

Lost—he was lost! He was an animal. Now he knew it. There was no control now. Only the desire to kill—to kill the man who had taken away more than life from him. His voice was a cry of desperation, of madness and sorrow.

Behind him now the sounds of pursuit. Police were scrambling out to the balcony. The gorilla leaped up to the balustrade and ran along the wide window ledge of the building.

Now he had been seen in the street below. The wild yelling of people rose up. He was being hunted! They had hunted him before. And then he remembered again that he was doing what Swangler had planned—but there was no help for it now. He was an animal, acting like an animal . . . what was it Devoli had said about the brute within him?

The window several feet ahead on the ledge swung open. Police were crowding there. He looked behind. They were following. Why? he thought. If he wanted to, he could drop the body once and for all. Why didn't he drop it? Swangler had wanted that. Swangler had planned it. Why was he holding the body? They were closing in on him now.

With a snarl, he bent over, seized the ledge and began climbing down the alleys cut in the stone building. There was a theatre marquee below.

Huge masses of people had formed below. The roar of the mob beat on his ears. The great electric signs were blinding him. Down he climbed, slowly, slowly to the marquee below. All the windows above were filled with people—people everywhere, and their voices all screaming at him.

But Devoli's voice he remembered. It came to him even over the crowds, over the memory of Roselle's voice as she had laughed when they danced.

He remembered he had to save the body he was carrying on his shoulders. The body was still now; it had stopped struggling and crying.

All his life came back again: his home—and the golden moon of the Congo—the music of Roselle's voice and the gun roaring in the Congo—a face more lovely than a dream—and his own, a monster's!

Now he stood on the marquee, swaying, and the body seemed to come alive again. He listened to it scream, holding its mouth close to him.

"Don't kill me! Don't kill me! I'll tell you everything! I'll tell the world!"

"You'll tell the world?" said the gorilla. His voice suddenly died away. He was so tired. He stood there gently, while down below and from every side, cameras were going. Slowly he lowered the man Peetson, and the man collapsed at the beast's feet. This was what Devoli had meant—and Roselle. All he had fought for. They had tried to stop him, but they hadn't. He had won, even for Steven Carpenter. It was over now. It was victory.

The gorilla stood there in the midst of chaos, alone on the marquee, staring down at the body at his feet. His whole life was like a dream, fading faster . . . faster. "Tell the world," he was whispering when the police climbed up to him.

Then, when the clubs crashed down on his head, all he could remember was Devoli telling him that he was still a brute inside. "Your primitive instincts—guard them!" They were hurting him, killing him, but he didn't raise a finger. He fell heavily, quietly, and a single groan came from him, and then he was still. . . .

BUT after that, it seemed as if it had been only the beginning. That was when "Sure" Peetson began to talk late that eventful night and didn't stop until he had run through six editions and two extras. The headlines followed each other down the pages, now of Peetson, now of the gorilla. The column that had become famous as "*Rumblings of W. G.*" ran in bold letters on the front pages. The printer's ink ran like the blood that had been spilled that night on the marquee.

U.S.S. COMMODORE TURNED BACK BY NAVY ORDER.

CONDITION OF GORILLA UNCHANGED.

RAID JERSEY SHIPYARDS: ALLIANCE OFFICERS JAILED.

GORILLA'S INJURY Baffles DOCTORS.

SWANGLER CONFESSES, IMPLICATES CON-FEDERATES.

GORILLA IN BARRED ROOM—NO VISITORS.

The spotlight had fallen and in its scope half a dozen cities blazed. The answer came in a flood of votes, like rain to soothe. The answer came with a mighty roar.

At the end of the week, the news came through.

Special IP Dispatch: The Whispering Gorilla has been pronounced an animal, and unfit for association with humans. It is believed that the present physical condition of the gorilla influenced the decision. . . .

American Newscast: The Whispering Gorilla and his devoted personal physician, Dr. Dartworth Devoli, will leave today for the Doctor's home in Africa. The Doctor said today that his world-famous pupil will henceforth live in a jungle habitat, to which his basic instincts are more suited. The permanent injury to his brain, committed by terrified police the night of the gorilla's sensational seizure, has deprived him of all the faculties which convinced millions of people that he was a human masquerading as an animal, instead of the opposite, which was true. . . .

THE thousands who swarmed at the freight docks could see little. The ship's gigantic cranes were hoisting cargo, and all that could be seen was the pointed top of a steel cage and the striped shadows that played over the forms of four persons who stood beside it.

"Sorry," said Dartworth Devoli to the other three, "that I couldn't have allowed you to see him during the past week, but you see how it is."

The great gorilla sat in a corner of the cage. Part of the bandage around his head had become unwound, and the end hung over part of the gorilla's face. He kept shaking it away and it kept coming back. Then he began chewing on the flowers that filled part of the cage.

He still wore clothes, and now he fumbled in a pocket and found some odds and ends. His head kept turning here and there, attracted by movement or by a flash of light.

"His conscious mind is gone for good," said Dr. Devoli. "He is rapidly losing his civilized habits and soon only gorilla instincts will govern his life."

The giant crane swung down, fastened to the cage. It began lifting, and the gorilla peered about him, noiselessly.

"Goodbye, W. G.!" Fuzziman called. He had to turn his eyes away.

Alan Bradford looked after the cage until it disappeared, unable to speak or move.

The men were shaking hands.

"Goodbye," said Dr. Devoli. "I'm an old man now, and my plans are uncertain. We may never meet again, but I've loved you all." His aged, aristocratic face was firm in defeat, and proud.

The whistle of the boat drowned out their farewells.

The last the two men and the girl saw was the aged scientist standing on deck, waving to them as the ship began to move.

In Bradford's arms, Roselle was weeping softly. "He was so alive, so kind," she sobbed.

"I had come to feel that I'd known him for years. I felt almost close to him at the end. . . ."

EVERYTHING happens to me. We finished taking on cargo at 13:10, Solar Constant Time, and I went to my turret for firing orders from the Sun City spacedrome officer. I plugged in the audio and stared into the familiar pan of Commander Allonhy.

I said, "Freight lugger *Saturn* preparing to up gravs, Commander. Standing by for the O.Q."

His jaw dropped like a barometer in a cyclone. He gasped, "You, Sparks? And the *Saturn*? What in blue space are you doing in port?"

"Don't look now," I advised him, "but we've been here since day before yesterday. Matter of fact, you and me h'isted elbows together last night at the Cosmic Bar, remember?"

"Remember?" he howled. "How could I? The last I heard of you, Cap Hanson was running the *Saturn* through the planetoids on some sort of cockeyed transmutation experiment!* When did you get back? How did you—?"

"Damn!" I groaned, "and double-damn!" I knew what had happened. It was that confounded new invention of Lancelot Biggs'. It was a uranium audio plate which, when activated in low radiations, acted as what you might call a "time-speech-trap."

In other words, I was talking to Allonhy not as he was *now*, but as he had been five months ago!

Don't ask me how it works. I'm a stranger here myself. Anyhow, I shook my head, shifted the dials, picked up Allonhy in the current time level, got a take-off order and relayed it to the bridge. Pretty soon a bell dinged, another one donged, and a slow, humming vibration tingled through the ship as our hypatomics caught hold. I steadied myself for the lift—

And *whammo!* The stars exploded and seven mules let me have it in the you-know-where, and there I was on the ceiling, squawking like a stuck pig and scrambling to get down to my control hanks. I didn't scramble long. For suddenly the artificial gravs came on and I made a perfect three-point landing—nose, knees and navel—on the floor.

I got up gingerly. No arms or legs fell off when I shook myself, so I started for the bridge to ask Cap

Trust Lancelot Biggs to get his ship into a mess just when speed and good navigation meant the prize contract of the year . . .!

Hanson whyfore. But just as I reached the door it swung open, and in came the skipper himself. He was swearing with the dull, unemotional fluidity of a man who has abandoned hope.

I knew, then. I said, "Biggs, Skipper?"

He moaned, "Talk to me, Sparks. Talk quick, an' make it interestin'. I promised Diane I wouldn't commit no mayhems on him, but I'm weakenin'. I keep thinkin' how I'd like to—"

"Easy, Cap," I soothed. "Some day he'll choke to death on his own Adam's-apple. But how come Biggs made the take-off? He's only the First Mate on this harge."

Hanson snapped, "Don't call this crate a harge!" Then he added, "Well, Sparks, I lost a bet with Biggs on the last trip. An' he won the right to navigate the next three Venus-to-Earth shuttles. So—" He shrugged. "He's handlin' the controls."

"Maltreating," I corrected, "is the word. I like Lancelot Biggs, Skipper. But I'd as soon ride a Martian firebird bareback as hop gravs with him in the turret. What do you say we—"

JUST then the door busted open again, and this time in came the skipper's daughter, Diane, followed by our gawky genius, L. Biggs. There was a sight for you. Beauty and the Bust! I know Venusian, Earth Standard, Universal and a smattering of Old Martian, but I don't know the words to describe Diane Hanson. She was paradise wrapped up in a five and a half foot hundle. She was honey and cream and lotus flowers streamlined into a single heartache. She was—well, she was terrific!

Biggs looked like "Before" in the *Are You a Man?*

By NELSON S. BOND

LANCELOT BIGGS: MASTER NAVIGATOR

*Fantastic Adventures, November, 1938.



There was a sudden lurch and we all floated toward the center of the cabin

advertisements. He was lean and lanky and gangly and awkward, and he walked like an anaemic stork on ice-skates. His chief topographical feature was an Adam's-apple that cavorted up and down his neck like a runaway elevator. I'd known Biggs six months, and still couldn't figure out whether he was a sixty horsepower genius or the luckiest mortal in space.

Right now, both he and Diane were wearing size 12 grins. With a prideful sidelong glance at her fiancée, the skipper's gal demanded, "Wasn't it wonderful, Dad? Lancelot made that take-off all by himself. Wasn't it something?"

Hanson strangled softly. I did a relief job. I said, honestly, "It was *something*. I haven't figured out *what* yet. After I get the curdles out of my brain—"

Mr. Biggs said apologetically, "I'm sorry if I caused you any inconvenience, Sparks. I was trying out a new wrinkle. Instead of using the aft blasts to throw us clear of Sun City spaceport, I used a single jet and reversed the ship's gravity. That gave us an automatic repulsion from the planet, and—"

"*What!*" roared the skipper. "Look here, Mr. Biggs, one more insane trick like that an' I'll have you cashiered, bet or no bet! I've been hoppin' graves for nigh onto forty years, an' you can take my word for it, them nonsensical ideas don't work! They only waste fuel, an'—"

"But," interjected Biggs, "I just checked with the engine room, sir. They—they complained about the moment of weightlessness, but admitted we'd saved approximately sixty percent of our normal escape fuel."

"The hell you say!" Cap Hanson's jaw played tag with his breast-bone. Then he gathered up his self-respect and expelled it in an outraged snort. "Nevertheless," he proclaimed, "an' howsoever—the stunt's no good. Come to find out, you'll prob'ly discover we're at least a degree off course an' behind schedule—"

Just at that moment the audio buzzed. I plugged in and contacted the second officer, Lt. Dick Todd, calling from the bridge. Todd said genially, "Hi, Sparks. Tell Mr. Biggs I just finished checking the course revision, will you? And tell him that little trick of his was a whiz-bang. The tape shows we've gained two parsecs on the normal escape and we're point oh-oh-oh on course!"

The violent sound was Cap Hanson and his dignity slamming the door behind them. . . .

AFTER he left, I coughed gently at Diane and Biggs, who evidently thought my turret was the back row of a movie house, and while Biggs was wiping the lipstick off his chin I said, "Look, Mr. Biggs, I don't want to be critical, but that damned audio plate of yours—" And I told him about what had happened just before the take-off.

He grinned amiably.

"It doesn't really matter, Sparks. That's one of the paradoxes you'll have to get used to. The uranium

trap has the faculty of probing into the past, but only when you operate it in low frequencies."

I said, "But I actually *talked* to Allonby over a five month lapse of time! Here's what gets me—shouldn't he have remembered that conversation yesterday when he and I had a couple of snorts together in Sun City?"

"No. Because you didn't talk to him on his present world-line. You see, every man moves through Time and Space in a series of four co-ordinates dependent upon what he does. Five months ago Allonby did *not* talk to you. Therefore he did not remember it yesterday. The next time you see him he will remember today's conversation as having happened—"

"Pardon the slight sizzling sounds," I apologized to Diane. "That's just my brains heterodyning."

"In other words," continued Biggs blandly, "today you sheared the Time-Space continuum from an unusual angle, thereby turning the Present-Past into the Past-Present, and altering the Future-Present. You might say you spoke not to Allonby, but to one of the many *probabilities* of Allonby. Do you understand now?"

"No," I said. "Where's the aspirin?"

"I'll try to make it clear," he persisted. "This is how it works—"

Then I got a break. The bug started chattering; I moved to the control board and said, "So sorry, folks. Me makee talk-talk on phonee. Goombye!"

They left, wrapped around each other like a pound of melted chocolates, and I switched in to hear the finger of Joe Marlowe buzzing me from Lunar Station III. Marlowe was in fine form. He greeted me with a "*Halo, nupaso!*" which means, "Hi, pickle-puss!"

I called him something untranslatable, and then he got down to business. "How's that dilapidated old crate of yours perking along, pal?" he asked.

"Fine," I told him. "We've got genius at the helm, romance on the bridge, and a cargo of Venusian pineapples in the hold. Which reminds me, how's your girl friend?"

"Comets to you, sailor!" he snapped back. "This is serious. I wanted to warn you, you'd better make a good trip. There's a prize dangling on it."

"Come again?"

"Word just leaked through from the central office. The Government has decided to turn its freight express transport over to the company whose next normal Venus-Earth run is made in the shortest time. It's a blind test, and nobody is supposed to know anything about it. The *Saturn* was clocked when it pulled out of Sun City, and its time will be checked against that of other competing liners—"

I GOT little cold duck-bumps on the forehead. When I brushed them they were wet. This was a tough break for the Corporation. The *Saturn* is the oldest space-lugger still doing active duty on the interplanetary runs. She was built way back there before the turn of the century. Lacking many modern improve-

ments, she is a ten-day freighter. One of our new luggers could make the same trip in six or seven; it was rumored that the *Slipstream*, pride of the Cosmos Company fleet, could make it in five!

I squawked, "Fires of Fomalhaut, Joe, it's not fair! The *Saturn's* the slowest can the Corporation owns! Why don't they let us run the *Spica* or the *Antigone* on a test flight?"

"It's a little matter of politics, friend," he returned wearily. "Politics—spelled g-r-a-f-t. Somebody's got a finger in the pie and wants the Cosmos Company to get the allotment. The *Slipstream* is leaving Sun City tonight. All you have to do is beat her into Long Island by about ten hours."

"Is that all?" I lamented. "You're sure they don't expect us to stop on the way in and load up with a half ton of diamond dust? Shooting meteors, Joe—"

He interrupted my ethereal sohs with a hasty, "Somebody breaking in on our band, guy. Got to go now. Best of luck!" The sign-off dropped the needle, and I was staring at a killed connection.

So there we were, way out on the limb. The fastest freighter in space competing against us for the fattest prize since the Government lotteried off the Fort Knox boardings. I worried two new wrinkles into my brow, then went below to find Cap Hanson. He heard my complaint with ominous calm. When I had finished he said, almost cheerfully, "Tough, ain't it?"

I stared at him. "Skipper, we've got to figure out a way to hobble home first! That Government contract carries at least three million credits a year. If we lose it for the Corporation, they'll tie the kit and kiboodle of us to stern firing jets!"

He just grinned ghoulishly and held out two hairy paws for my inspection. "You see them hands, Sparks?"

"I'm a radio operator," I told him, "not a manicurist."

"Them hands," he persisted, "is clean as a pipeline on Pluto. Take a look at the log. Mister Lancelot Biggs is writ down as the C.O. for this trip. Which relieves me of all an' sundry obligations."

I said, "But, Skipper, you've had the experience! In an emergency like this—"

He shook his head. "Sparks, we ain't got a chance of heatin' the *Slipstream* to Earth. Not the chance of a snowman on Mercury. I'm perfectly satisfied to let Mr. Biggs do the worryin', an' if the Corporation's thickheaded enough to want to blame anybody for our failure, I'm content to let him have *that* honor, too!"

He grinned again.

"Maybe after this," he said, "Biggs won't be quite so damn cocky. An' maybe Diane won't think he's the hotshot he lets on to be!"

Which was absolutely all the skipper would say. I wasted words for five more minutes, then went to find Lancelot Biggs. . . .

HE wasn't on the bridge. He wasn't in the secondary control cabin or in the mess hall or in

the holds. Nor in the engine room. I found him, finally, in the ship's library, sprawled full-length on a divan, holding a book in one hand and waving the other arm in the air, keeping time to the poem he was reading aloud.

When I entered he looked up and said, "Hello there, Sparks! You're just in time to hear something lovely. This space-epic of the Venusian poet-laureate, Hyor Kandru. It's called *Alas, Infinity!* Listen—"

He read,

"... comes then the quietude of endless void,

The heart seeks out and, breathless, listens to
Magnificent monotonies of space. . . ."

Monotony your eye! There are times when I'd trade all my bug-pounding hours for a nice, quiet, padded cell out somewhere beyond Pluto. I said, "Listen, Mr. Biggs—"

"You know, Sparks," he said dreamily, "sometimes I wonder if the poetic mind is not more acute than the strictly scientific one. Since I met Diane, and she acquainted me with the symphonic beauties of poetry, I've thought of so many new things. The never-ending wonder of the Saturnian rings, for instance. The problem of space vacuoles—"

"Speaking of vacuoles," I interrupted, "me and you and about fourteen other mariners from the good ship *Saturn* are going to be in one pretty soon—if by vacuole you mean a hole. Because—"

And then I told him. Misery being, as rumor hath it, a gregarious soul, it did my heart good to see the way he jolted up from his horizontal position.

"But—but, Sparks!" he quavered, "that's terribly unfair!"

"So," I told him, "is hetting on the gee-gees. Only one hoss can win, but they all find backers. The point is, what are we going to do about it?"

"Do?" he piped. "What are we going to do? We're going to do plenty. Come on!"

We went to the engine room. There Chief Engineer Garrity heard Biggs' plea with granite aplomb, then slowly shook his head from side to side.

"Ye're no suggestin', Mr. Biggs," he said, "that I try to double the *Saturn's* speed?"

"You must!"

Garrity grinned mirthlessly, ducking his grizzled head to designate the laboring, old-fashioned hypatomics in the firing room. "Them motors," he said, "is calculated to carry us from Earth to Venus, and visey-versey, in ten days. By babyin' 'em we can make it in nine. By strainin' 'em we can make it in eight—mebbe."

"But if we force 'em beyond that limit—" Once again he shook his head. "—we'll arrive at Long Island rocketport as a fine conglomeration of assorted holts, plates and rivets. Ye wouldn't like that, Mr. Biggs," he appended speculatively.

We went to the bridge, then, and discussed the problem with our junior officer, Dick Todd. Dick had lots of ideas, none of them good. Our confab ended in a "no-decision" draw. And finally I said, "Well,

Mr. Biggs, I'm afraid it's over my head. I'd better get back to my turret in case any messages come through. . . ."

He didn't even hear me. He was pacing the floor, moaning softly from time to time and scraping his scalp with frenzied fingers.

ALL of which took place our first day out of Sun City. It was a bad start, and things rapidly became worse. At 24.00 on the dot, Solar Constant Time, I got a flash from a ham operator on Venus, advising me that the *Slipstream* had just slipped her grays. Which meant that the race was on.

Huh! What race?

Eight hours later our *perilens* picked up the *Slipstream*. She was cutting a path through space like a silver arrow. And you can bet your bottom buck that her skipper knew how important this trip was. I was asleep when she whizzed by us, but my relief man woke me up to show me the message her C.O. had sent us. It said, "Greetings, goats! Want a tow?"

It wouldn't have been a bad idea at that!

Well, Garrity and his black gang were working themselves blue, and to the everlasting credit of the *Saturn*, I'll confess that the old freighter wallowed along in handsome style. We logged a trifle over three million miles in the next twenty-four hours, which is about five hundred thousand over par for our crate.

We did it with music, too! The plates were clinking and straining, the jets were hissing like a nestful of outraged rattlers, and once or twice, when our Moran deflectors shunted off fragments of meteoric matter, I thought we were going to move out to make room for some intra-stellar cold storage.

So what? The *Slipstream*, traveling at better than double our speed, knocked off a cool six million that same day! Oh, if ever a "race" was in the bag, that one was!

The second day was another dose of the same business. Biggs insisted that we maintain our forced speed, although Garrity warned him bluntly that it was dangerous.

"I been twenty years in space, Mr. Biggs," Garrity told him sternly. "I look forward to spendin' another score the same way. But I have no desire to whisk along the spaceways as a glowing clinker."

Lancelot Biggs said desperately, "But we've got to do our best, Chief! We're beaten, yes—but we've got to show a little fight. Anything may happen. They may have an accident—a breakdown—"

There was a pathetic intensity in his voice. Once again, as several times before, I found myself thinking this Lancelot Biggs guy, screwy as he might seem, had plenty of abdomen-stuffings. Garrity must have felt the same way, for he said, grudgingly, "Verra well, then. But. . . ."

So, for the third day in succession, our hypatomic motors churned like a bevy of Martian canal-kitties having their morning dunk. And for the third day in

succession, the Cosmos Company's super-freighter, the *Slipstream*, proceeded to show us the winking red dot of her rapidly disappearing after-jets.

And then it happened!

I WAS in my turret, reading a copy of *Spaceways Weekly*, when all of a sudden my bug started chattering and the condenser needle started hopping. I plugged in and caught a garbled, frantic warning from the Sparks on the *Slipstream*.

"Calling IPS *Saturn*! Calling IPS *Saturn*, stand clear for back-drag! Stand clear for back-drag!"

I jammed the "stand clear" warning to the bridge and shot a hasty query back to the *Slipstream* operator.

"*Saturn* standing clear, pal. What makes?"

"Trouble on declension line sixteen-oh-four. Stay off our trajectory! We're running into a vac—"

Then suddenly the message went dead; the condenser needle went to sleep on zero; I was hammering a futile key at an operator who could no longer communicate with me.

But I knew what the trouble was. Our streamlined rival had nosed into a space vacuole!

By this time, the *Saturn* was creaking and groaning like a jitterbug on a coil-spring mattress; bells were dingling all through the runways, and the forward blast jets were making an unholy din as they bounced us off trajectory. And every time one exploded, of course, the lugger shook as if a gigantic fist had smacked it square in the nose.

Footsteps pounded up the gangway, the door opened, and I had visitors. Cap Hanson, Diane Hanson, and our acting Skipper, Lancelot Biggs. They all hollered at once.

"What is it, Sparks?"

"Vacuole!" I snapped. "The *Slipstream* broke into one. They're preparing for the back-drag now."

Diane Hanson's eyes were like twin saucers.

"Vacuole?" she repeated. "What's that? What's a vacuole, Lancelot?"

Biggs said, "A hole in space, Diane. Their exact nature has never been accurately determined. All we know is that space itself, being subject to material warp, oftentimes develops 'empty spots' of super-space within itself. These areas correspond, roughly, to 'air pockets' encountered by planetary aviators; they are even more similar to the curious 'sacs' found in proto-plasmic substances like amoebae."

Diane faltered, "A—hole in space! It sounds incredible! Are they dangerous?"

"Apparently not," I told her. "Lots of space ships have tumbled into them, and in every case the ship has eventually worked its way out. Sometimes they're carried far off course, though. That's why the *Slipstream* has to back-drag, and do it fast." I grinned. "Sometimes when I'm not too busy I'll draw you a picture of a space vacuole. It looks pretty. A hole full of nothing—in nothing!"

Cap Hanson had been peering through the *perilens* in my turret. Now he let loose a great roar of delight. "I see her! I seen her stern jets flickerin' for a moment. Here she—Nope! She's in again!"

Biggs explained to the girl, "She's trying to back out. The only difficulty is, she has to reverse engines and come out with an acceleration built up to match that at which she entered. Which means—"

"Which means," I interjected hopefully, "we're not beaten yet, folks! When the *Slipstream* husts clear of that vacuole, she's going to be hell-bent in the opposite way to Earth. Mr. Biggs, if we can miss the vacuole and keep going, we might—"

Still at the *perilens*, Cap Hanson now yelled, "By golly, I just seen her again! But you ought to see where she is! That vacuole's a rip-snorter! Tearin' like a fool—"

"Which way?" cried Biggs.

"Starboard declension. You never seen anything as fast as that there gallopin' bole. Hey, here comes the old *Slipstream*! Whee! Nice job, Skipper!"

I saw it then. It came blasting back toward us like a ray from a needle-gun. I couldn't help admiring the good sportsmanship in Cap Hanson which, even though he had seen his competitor's ship break free of the bondage that might have cost it the race, caused him to commend the navigator's space-skill.

Now the Skipper turned to Lancelot Biggs, and there was a battle-light in his eyes. "Mr. Biggs, this gives us a fightin' chance to win the race! The *Slipstream* will be a day makin' up for this lost time. I'll relieve you of your command now—"

But there was a strange, thoughtful look in Biggs' eyes. He said, slowly, "Did you say starboard, Skipper?"

"Eh? What's that? Yes, I said starboard. Well—did you hear me, Mr. Biggs? I've decided not to be hard on you. I'll relieve you of your command now . . . take the *Saturn* on into port. . . ."

And Lancelot Biggs said, "No!"

BEFORE Cap Hanson had stopped gasping—I decided afterward it was a gasp, though at first I thought it was a symptom of apoplexy—Biggs stepped to the ship's intercommunicating system and buzzed the bridge. To Todd he snapped, "Mr. Todd, plot new co-ordinates to intersect with the vacuole as soon as possible!"

Then Todd gasped and I gasped and Diane gasped and the Skipper was still gasping, and Lancelot Biggs turned to face us, faintly pale, breathing a little hard, but with a look of curious determination on his face.

"I know," he said, "you all think I'm crazy. Well, maybe I am. But I'm not going to surrender my command, and I'm going to see this race through in the way that seems most fitting to me—"

Then he gulped, turned, and gangled from the room. Diane started crying softly. I said, "Now, now!" wondering if the words sounded as silly to her as they did to me. And Hanson came out of his stupor with

a blat that lifted the roof an inch and a half.

"What the blue space does he think he's going to do? 'Intersect the vacuole'! The crazy idiot! Does he mean to throw away all the advantage we've gained?"

"Don't ask me," I said dourly. "I'm not an esper.*" My instrument was clacking again; it was the operator of the *Slipstream* calling.

"We're clear, *Saturn*," he wired. "Thanks for getting off course. You're too far off, though. Better watch out. You're headed smack into the vacuole."

I wired back, "We like it that way," and refused to pay any attention to his continued queries. A dismal silence had fallen over my turret. The bypatomics had picked up now; I could tell by the vibration that we were on our way, full steam ahead, toward—what?

I found out. Not then, and not for several hours, but at dinnertime. I had just taken my seat at the table and Slops was just leaning over my shoulder, ladling soup into my bowl, when there came a high, shrieking whine from the engine room, the lights flickered, something went boomety-clang—and the bottom fell out of the universe!

My stomach gave a sickening lurch, so did the mess hall, so did Slops, and so did the soup. About four of us went into an involuntary buddle on the floor; when I came up again I had purée of vegetables, luke-warm, all over me, and my hair had so many alphabet noodles in it you could have rented me out at a public library.

The din was terrific, but it all meant one thing; a question admirably summed up by the badly frightened Slops as he screamed, "Wotinell's the matter!"

I said wearily, "Sue me if I'm wrong, friends. But I believe our screwball navigator, Mr. Biggs, has finally piloted us into the vacuole. . . ."

THE funny part is, Biggs wasn't even dismayed about it! I made a half-hearted pretense at eating, then skipped up to the bridge to find out what—if anything—Biggs was doing about this new disaster.

The answer was obvious. Absolutely nothing. Pale of face, but still determined of mien, he was sitting in the control pilot's lounge-chair shaking his head stubbornly as Cap Hanson, Lt. Todd, Chief Engineer Garrity and every other brevetman aboard the ship bombarded him with pleas to "do something!"

"Gentlemen," he said, "gentlemen, I ask you to remember that Captain Hanson assigned me the privilege of navigating this trip. As navigator, it is my right to do what I consider best—"

Todd, who liked Biggs, said nervously, "But, Lanse, we're right in the middle of the vacuole! Aren't you going to give orders for a back-drag? We've got to get out of here. Heaven only knows—"

Cap Hanson was purple with impotent rage. "Wait!" he was squalling. "Just wait till we get back

* Esper—a fortune teller who makes his living by foretelling the future through his use of "extra-sensory perception"—Ed.

to Earth! I'm goin' to have you busted out of the service as soon as—" A strange look came over his face. "Golly! When we get back to Earth? We ain't never gonna get there less'n we do somethin' quick!"

Lancelot Biggs said, "Be patient, gentlemen!"

Garrity said cajolingly, "Look, lad—mayhap you don't understand the difficulties we're in? Suppose you be a good chap an' let the Skipper take the controls—?"

Lancelot Biggs said, "Just be patient. I would like to explain, but I think I'd better not! Not yet—at any rate."

Cap looked at me. I put in my two cents' worth.

"Mr. Biggs," I said, "you can read those charts on the wall. Don't you see we're being carried hundreds of thousands of miles off course? This vacuole is traveling way over to the right of our course, hitting an abnormal rate of speed—and we're imbedded in it like a fly in amber. We've already lost the race; pretty soon we'll lose our—" I stopped, not wanting to say "lives" in front of Diane.

Lancelot looked at me somberly.

"I should have thought, Sparks," he told me, "that you would understand. With your education and training—" But he seemed undecided. He stared at Diane. "Diane—you believe in me, don't you?"

Boy, I'll tell you that gal has what it takes. A long moment passed, during which Diane looked squarely into Lancelot Biggs' eyes. What she found there, only she could tell you. But, "Yes, Lancelot," she said. "I trust you."

His shoulders stiffened, then, just the slightest bit. And a faint smile gathered at the corners of his lips. He said, "That's all I wanted to hear. Very well, gentlemen, be patient for just ten more hours. . . ."

BY far the worst feature of being caught in a vacuole is the fact that you're completely isolated from the rest of the universe. These super-spatial areas; these dead spots of hyper-emptiness, do not obey the common laws of space mechanics. There's no radio transmission through a vacuole; the only laws that seem to apply are the laws of motion and relativity.

This time, even the relativist principles seemed to go haywire. Lancelot Biggs had demanded that we be patient for ten hours—but to me those ten hours seemed like ten centuries. Millennia, maybe. Seconds crawled. Minutes dragged. Hours were fabulous periods of time. You could almost sit still and feel your hair graying on your scalp.

I tried to read a book, and gave it up as a bad job after I discovered I'd re-read the same page six times. Then I fiddled with my dials, but all I could get out of them was a strange, singing, unearthly hum. I had a feeling of boding suspense, as though I were an insensate beast caged in an elevator that was rising through darkness to an unguessed destination.

Boy, am I getting poetic! Anyhow, that's how I

felt, and if you want to make something of it, stop down by the IPS spaceport at Long Island and ask for Bert Donovan!

I managed to while away a couple of hours figuring out where the *Slipstream* was by this time. Like I said, she was a five-day freighter. But she'd lost almost a full day in her tangle with the vacuole—our vacuole—and in spite of the fact that she'd now put on every bit of juice she had, she wouldn't make the trip in much less than five and a half days.

Which, of course, didn't help us any. The *Saturn* was normally a ten-day ship. Now, caught in the vacuole, it was a question of when, if ever, we got back onto our trajectory.

What puzzled me most was the fact that in the past I'd come to look upon Lancelot Biggs as something of a genius; the kind of guy who could pull rabbits out of a hat. Like the time he rescued our ship from Runt Hake and his pirate crew.* But now Biggs seemed to have gone into a complete funk; a wan and stubborn silence as to his reasons for having given up the battle.

Well, it was his business; not mine. He'd buttered his bread—now let him lie in it! I looked at the clock once more. Nine hours had elapsed; a little more than that. So I sauntered back to the bridge.

Everyone up there was in a fine state of the jitters—except Mr. Biggs and Diane. With fine disregard for those about them, they were curled up together on a chart-table reading poetry! Cap Hanson had gnawed his fingernails down to the second knuckle. Dick Todd was pacing the floor like a captive wildcat. I said, meekly enough, "Mr. Biggs—the ten hours is almost up."

"Mmmm!" said Lancelot Biggs.

Cap Hanson turned on him savagely. "Well! Well, do something! And you, Diane, I'm ashamed of you! Sitting here with that—that nincompoop's head draped all over your shoulder!"

Diane rose, smiling pertly. "All right, so I'm untidy. Well—show them, Lancelot!"

Biggs rose. He looked carefully at the clock; then at the statometer. He moved to the intercommunicating system, gargled a word to the engine room below. "Mr. Garrity, would you be kind enough to revolve the ship?"

Hanson yelled, "Re—revolve the—Hey! Grab him, somebody! He's gone space-batty! He's slipped his gravis!"

From below there came the sound of the rotors going into operation. We couldn't feel anything, of course. The ship's artificial gravis hold you firm to the floor no matter which is top or bottom in space. There being no such thing. After a minute Biggs said, "Thank you, Mr. Garrity. Now, if you will be kind enough to reverse gravis and throw out the top-deck repulsion beams?"

Garrity obeyed. There came a sudden shock; everything movable in the room moved. Including

* *Fantastic Adventures*, February, 1940—Ed.

me. I fell to the middle of the room, hung there gapingly, weightless, the same as everyone else. The *Saturn* lurched and shuddered; it felt as if something trembled along her beams for a brief instant.

Then, suddenly, we were literally scorching through space again! Real space—not that phoney hyperstuff of the vacuole. Biggs yelled, "Normal gravs, Garrity! Alter course to point-six-one for three minutes, then land. . . ."

Cap Hanson screamed, "What the—what's going on here? Land? What do you mean—land!"

And Lancelot Biggs said, "If you'll be kind enough to look through the *perilens*, Captain. . . ."

It was Earth. Just as big as life and three times as natural. A hop-skip-and-jump beneath us. We had made the Venus-to-Earth shuttle in four days, eight hours!

AFTERWARD, when the Government committee had left, congratulating us upon having won the allotment, and the IPS officials had departed like a trio of overgrown sunbeams on legs, Hanson, Todd, Diane, Biggs and I were alone in the control turret of the *Saturn*.

To the smiling First Mate, Cap Hanson said, "Biggs, this business of apologizin' to you after every crackpot adventure is gettin' monotonous. But I do it again—with the provision that you tell me how the hell an' what the hell happened."

Biggs fidgeted and looked uncomfortable.

"Well, to begin with, I knew we were licked if we tried to race the *Slipstream* in any normal fashion—"

"The proper word," I interjected, "is skunked."

"Yes. So when I saw what happened to the *Slipstream* when it fell into the vacuole, I saw a way in which we might possibly come out on top. I didn't want to explain, though, for if the method failed, Captain Hanson might be reprimanded for permitting the trial—"

"Method?" demanded Hanson. "What method?"

"Piggy-back!" grinned Biggs. "You'll remember that we commented on the amazing speed with which the vacuole was traveling through space. A speed greater than our own; even greater than that of the *Slipstream*."

"I purposely plunged the *Saturn* into the vacuole. The *Slipstream*, caught in that same sphere of hyperspace, made the mistake of back-dragging free. I let the vacuole carry us to Earth. It's as simple as that!"

Hanson said dazedly, "Simple? Which? The method or me? You done so many funny things—for instance, we got out of the vacuole without back-draggin'. How?"

"Oh, that! Well, that was just a little thing I figured out while we were waiting. It seemed stupid to waste fuel back-dragging from a pocket in space. After all, the easiest way out of a pocket is to let yourself be *dumped* out. I just reversed the gravitational plates, let Earth, which I had reckoned mathematically to be 'above' us, attract us out of the pocket.

"Since there is neither 'up' nor 'down' in space, we merely fell out of the vacuole pocket!"

"It penetrates," said Cap Hanson admiringly. "Yep, it finally penetrates. Well, boys?"

He glanced at us significantly. I knew what he was thinking. Diane and Biggs were showing unmistakable signs of wanting to be alone. But there was one more thing—

"Look, Mr. Biggs," I said. "Your explanation is all right, but it doesn't clear up the matter of *direction*! The vacuole wasn't traveling on the line of our Venus-Earth trajectory at all. It was shifting to starboard by fifteen points, which is why we were able to intercept it. How come—"

Lancelot Biggs looked faintly surprised.

"Why, Sparks, didn't you guess? That was the thing that made our amazing speed possible. To us, traveling our ten-day route, it *looked* as if the vacuole were moving to the right of Earth. Actually it was moving directly toward the spot where Earth would be in ten more hours. It was, in a way of speaking, an express-train racing along a short-cut. We hopped the train, and—here we are!"

There was a tiny cough from somewhere under the shelter of his arm. A soft voice said, "Sparks—"

"Yes, Miss Diane?"

"Sparks—would you mind closing the door on the way out, please?" asked Diane Hanson.

So I did. I can take a hint as well as the next guy. . . .

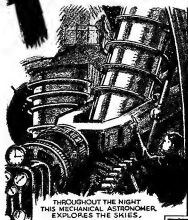
WAR IN THE AIR!

The conflicts in Europe may be a continuation of the "war of nerves" . . . cunning pitted against cunning . . . blockade against counter-blockade . . . but the war in the air goes right back to the point where the First World War left off—a fight for supremacy in design, which means supremacy in performance! This is the opinion of Major Alexander P. deSavarsky, famous World War veteran. Don't fail to read his informative, unbiased account of today's war in the air. Turn to page 18 of the

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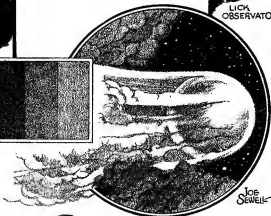
THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT
THIS MECHANICAL ASTRONOMER,
EXPLORES THE SKIES.

ON MARCH 8, 1891, A STORY
-APPEARING IN THE SAN
FRANCISCO EXAMINER,
CAUSED GREAT EXCITEMENT
AMONG ASTRONOMERS. IT
DESCRIBED A SUPPOSED INVENT-
ION BY PROFESSOR E.E. BARNARD,
LICK OBSERVATORY ASTRONOMER,
PURPORTED TO LOCATE COMETS
BY MECHANICAL MEANS,
THEREBY SAVING WEARY HOURS
OF SKY SEARCHING—.



LICK
OBSERVATORY

IT WAS BY MEANS OF THIS COMET
SPECTRUM BAND—CONSISTING OF
BRIGHT YELLOW, GREEN AND BLUE
HYDRO-CARBON BANDS—THAT COMETS
WERE LOCATED BY THEIR RAYS—



JOE
SEWELL



Professor E.E. BARNARD,
THE DISTINGUISHED ASTRONOMER,
AT LICK OBSERVATORY UPON WHOM
THE HOAX WAS PERPETRATED. IT
WAS CLAIMED THAT HIS INVENTION
WOULD LOCATE ANY COMET WITHIN
RANGE OF THE TELESCOPE WITHOUT
HUMAN HELP. LINKING HIS NAME WITH
THE INVENTION CAUSED SCIENTISTS ALL OVER
THE WORLD TO ACCEPT THE STORY AS TRUE.



Professor KEELER,
SPECTROSCOPIST AT LICK
OBSERVATORY, SUSPECTED BY
PROFESSOR BARNARD AS THE
PERPETRATOR OF THE HOAX.

WHEN THE COMET CAME WITHIN RANGE
OF THE TELESCOPE, THE PRISM INSTANTLY
ANALYZED THE LIGHT, CHANGED ELECTRICAL
RESISTANCE, CLOSED ALL CIRCUITS AND
LITERALLY TRAPPED THE COMET IN VIEW.



Professor SCHAEBERLE,
ELECTRICAL AND MATHEMATICAL
THEORIST, WHO REPUTEDLY HELPED
PERFECT THE COMET TRAP,

HOAXES

By JULIUS SCHWARTZ

Ranking next to the famous Moon Hoax for effectiveness is the Comet-Seeker Hoax, perpetrated on Prof. Barnard

THE most famous astronomical hoax of all time, "The Moon Hoax," had Sir John Herschel as its innocent victim. Not as well known, but almost as effective, was "The Comet-Seeker Hoax" perpetrated on Professor E. E. Barnard in 1891 when he was connected with the Lick Observatory, and was world-famous as a discoverer of comets.

One fact must be given for a proper understanding of the background of the hoax. The thorn in the side of all students of the sky is the continuous "guiding" of their telescopes; their hope is that some day this affliction will be taken care of by some automatic guiding device.

On March 8, 1891, Professor Barnard picked up a copy of the *San Francisco Examiner* and thereby received the shock of his life, for he was being hailed in its pages as the inventor of an automatic selenium cell comet-seeker that

DISCOVERS COMETS ALL BY ITSELF

The Meteor Gets in Range, Electricity Does the Rest.

Professor E. E. Barnard, Lick astronomer, has discovered a wonderful scientific invention that will do away with the astronomer's weary hours of searching. The idea is founded on the spectrum of the comet's light. It's just like guening for wandering stars with a telescope.

Illustrating the article were three cuts—a view of the complete comet-seeker, a diagram of its objective prism, and the electric circuit of its Wheatstone bridge.

No resumé could do justice to the exquisite write-up of the hoax, so we reproduce extracts:

... The comet-seeker has a hard time of it, exposed, as he needs must be, to all sorts of weather, in the open air, with no protection from the wind, at all hours of the night, sweeping over every square inch of the sky with all his powers of acuteness at the highest pitch, lest the faintest object be overlooked. ...

This, however, is the age of invention, and the following graphic account of mechanical comet-seekers discovered by one of the professors at Lick Observatory. ... Professor Barnard himself explained the invention to me.

"You see," said the renowned astronomer, "the idea has been revolving in my mind for years. The mechanical details were clear enough in my mind and all I needed was the disclosure of some peculiarity in the comet's light which would announce itself immediately on entering the field of the telescope. I felt that spectrum analysis of the comet was a necessary preliminary, and therefore suggested my dilemma to Professor Keeler.

"Now Keeler knows all that is worth knowing about the spectroscopy, and we studied the matter out together. It is known that the spectrum of each and every comet so far observed consists of three bright hydrocarbon bands, in the yellow, green and blue portions of the image. ... In the case of an ordinary star or planet, these three central

bands are absent. ... Evidently this peculiarity of the comet's light had to be utilized. ...

"Presently Professor Schaeberle joined the party. ... Schaeberle is pretty well posted on electrical and mechanical matters. Keeler is a thorough spectroscopist, and I know a thing or two about comets, and among the three of us we soon had the problem solved. Come up to the roof and I will show you the invention. ...

"When the moon goes down I will start the telescope 'sweeping' as we call it, commencing at the southwest point of the horizon. ... Having ascertained that the clock-work is wound up and working I leave my comet-seeker to its own intelligent work, and give my attention to stellar photography and other important matters. Throughout the night my human telescope explores the skies. Stars, nebulae, and clusters innumerable crowd into the field with every advance of the clock, but the telescope gives no sign of their presence. ...

"But let even the faintest comet come into range, and see what are the consequences! The prism instantly analyzes the light, the omnipresent bright hydrocarbon bands fall upon their respective slits. The light of these, reaching the strip of selenium, so changes the electrical resistance as to disturb the balance of the Wheatstone bridge, and a feeble current is sent through the wire. This in turn closes all the circuits of the powerful Leclanché battery, and the comet is caught, as in a trap.

"An alarm-bell rings in my bedroom down at the cottage. Of course, the signal swiftly summons me to the roof. I remove the prism thus, and, without disturbing the adjustment of the instrument, detach the box containing the diaphragm, etc., and substitute an ordinary eyepiece, in this manner. A single glance should suffice to reveal the position of the newcomer. ..."

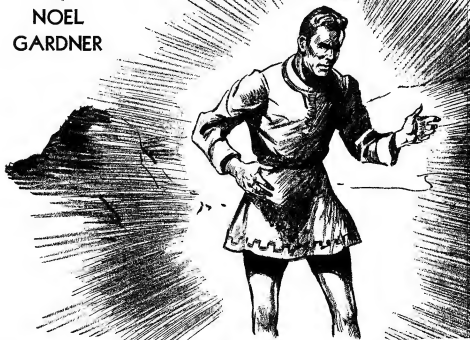
Boiling with rage, Professor Barnard immediately dispatched letters of denial to *The Examiner*. But the hoax had been too well planned and not a word of his frantic disavowal appeared. Other papers took up the story and for the next few years Professor Barnard was deluged with letters from all parts of the world requesting the details of his marvelous automatic comet-seeker!

Years later, the "mysterious author" confessed to the hoax with the explanation that he never thought it would all be taken so seriously. Later, when Barnard was asked if he knew who perpetrated the hoax he replied, "Well, I'm not sure, but I suspect Keeler."

The sketches accompanying the article strongly resemble Keeler's work. But we shall never be quite sure of the facts as all of that astronomical staff of Lick Observatory has since passed on. Some of the staff, like Barnard, were so serious-minded where astronomical research was concerned, that it is difficult to picture them as authors of the hoax. But Keeler was always ready to laugh at other astronomers, or at himself, if need be.

The SHINING MAN

By
NOEL
GARDNER



I FELT the tension in the council cave the moment I entered. Simon the Elder came to me and said, "You must be calm, Jo. Something has happened, but you must hold your temper."

Quickly my gaze flickered around the huge chamber. More than fifty Merricans were gathered here. Firelight gleamed redly on the weathered, strong faces of my tribesmen, the strong-thewed men who wore wolfskin or deerhide, the roamers of the Pensivaynee hills. The fire caught in the flint knives, or against the few metal blades from the times of the Ancients which were taken from the ruins of Pitsber.

I looked then at the throne—the rock slab where the ruler of the tribe should sit. It was vacant. A

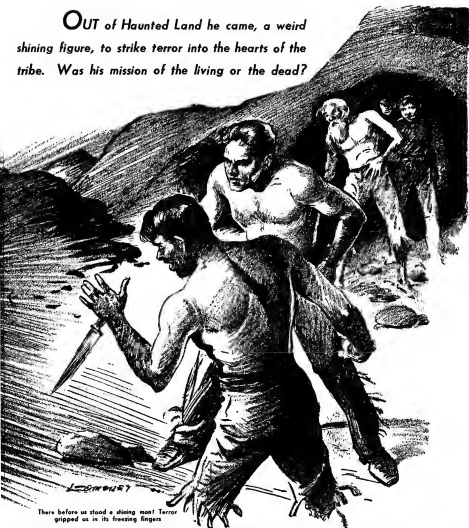
spear—the challenge—lay across it. No eye was turned to me, though I sensed the alertness of everyone. The gage of battle had been cast, and I dropped my deer-carass on the earth. I went to my mother, Veena.

"Why are you not upon the throne?" I asked.

Her gray face did not change. "It has been a year today since your brother Eli decreed that I should rule while he went to the Haunted Land. The year has ended and our tribal laws say that now the challenge is here and a man must rule."

So it was. A year had gone by since the day Eli had gone to avenge my brother North. Now both had not returned, and the Haunted Land had taken an-

OUT of Haunted Land he came, a weird shining figure, to strike terror into the hearts of the tribe. Was his mission of the living or the dead?



There before us stood a shining man! Terror gripped us in its freezing fingers

other life from us, the Land which sent its emissaries to kill us quietly at night, to take our women beyond the hills. North had gone to search for his wife, and Eli had gone after him.

"Whose is this spear?" I demanded.

Then a man rose from where he sat, a great red-cheeked man, with a tangled black beard that fell down over his hairy chest. Buffalo-mighty was Orgu, with twinkling little eyes and a voice that often belled out laughter. But few laughed with Orgu, for

only cruelty roused his merriment.

Only my father had been stronger than Orgu, and it was my father who, years ago, had smashed the giant's nose into a hideous lump of flattened tissue. From then on, Orgu had hardly been a member of the tribe. For months at a time he had stayed away, living by himself. Now Orgu saw his chance for vengeance, I suppose, since by tribal law I was still a child.

A child at twenty! By Lincoln, my father, had bequeathed to me, his youngest, the physique of a

titan, and he had left in my blood the capacity of blinding rages which men called the berserker madness. Twenty years ago my father died, treacherously slain by a spear-thrust in the back. My brother North had ruled after him, and then Eli mounted the throne.

In a week I would be twenty-one and rule would be mine by heritage. But Orgu had not waited. The spear on the Throne was a deadly insult, and if a man be slain, or a woman shamed, the nearest of kin must avenge. So I stared at Orgu in the firelight, and cast away the knife at my belt. He did the same.

A voice came out of the shadows. Again Simon the Elder shuffled forward, a bent, gaunt man with parchment skin stretched across his bald skull. Very old was Simon, the last of a cult of magicians whose origin was lost in antiquity. In his little cave he pored over curious objects which he called books, and often Simon told us wondrous tales of the Ancients, who could fly through the skies and chain the thunderbolt. His voice was dry and small.

"It is the Ordeal," he said. "By our law, you two must fight unarmed, to the death. Yet, Orgu, you would have done well to wait till Eli returned, or till Jo mounted the Throne."

Orgu's little eyes dwelt on me. "Eli will not return. Did North come back from the Haunted Land? And shall a woman or a fool rule over the Merricans?"

MY cheeks flushed at that. I gestured, and the tribe scuttled back into the shadows against the walls. He lumbered forward like a great bear, huge and terrible. His arms were tree-trunks—and they reached for me.

I met Orgu; my right hand clamped on his left wrist; he gripped my wrist with his right hand. We stood there silent. But the muscles rolled and surged under our hides, and our lips peeled back from our teeth as each strove to break the other's clutch. Flames of agony raced up my arm. I thought it would snap in a moment—but Orgu, too, felt pain!

He let go, and his fist smashed at my throat. I jerked aside in time, but Orgu's arms closed about my body. Instantly they constricted, in a hold that could easily snap my spine. I flung up my hand, to get the heel of it under Orgu's bearded chin, but he was too quick. His face buried itself in my shoulder. His teeth tried to find my great artery.

I could have tried to break Orgu's hack also, but instead I hooked my heel behind his foot and lunged forward. The two of us crashed down on the rock floor, Orgu undermost. Though the breath went out of him, he did not loosen his grip. I tried to forget the white-hot bar of fire that seemed to tear at my back. Dimly I could see the face of Simon in the shadows, gaunt and intent, and the worn gray face of Veena. Her hand went out, pointing.

I understood her. I rolled over, carrying Orgu with me. We plunged into the embers of the fire—and Orgu had not expected that! Sparks and coals flew as we sprang apart and leaped away, beating out

the flames that were in our hair.

Orgu came in again, grinning. His fist struck me on the breast, and I think he was surprised when I did not give back. Instead, I drove a blow that pulped the giant's already malformed nose and sent blood spurting on his beard.

Orgu laughed then. His breath choked through sheer murder-lust, and I could hear his yellow fangs grinding together.

"My father gave you the same blow!" I taunted him.

The little eyes narrowed. Orgu's knee flashed up, and sickening pain raced through me at the foul blow. Before I could recover, the giant was upon me, hearing me down to the floor. His heavy body pressed me down. The iron fingers sank into my throat. Frantically, vainly, I tried to tear them free.

Nothing existed now but the brute face of Orgu, bearded and hideous and blood-smeared. The red drops fell upon my face. I heard Orgu's triumphant whisper:

"Aye—the same blow! And I shall kill you, as I killed your father, fool!"

As Orgu killed my father—treacherously, by a spear-thrust in the back! By the Sun, Orgu erred in saying that! For it meant his death.

The red drops fell. And they stained the world scarlet. The dark rage that mounted within me made me, briefly, weak and sick.

The weakness passed. In its place came strength—power that poured into my veins and thundered through my mind. I do not quite remember what happened after that. . . .

Men say that I opened my mouth and howled like a wolf, my eyes blind and savage as a beast's. And that my throat hardened and tightened under Orgu's strangling fingers. Faith of God, when my fists smashed up at the killer's face they pulped it into bloody ruin. I did not know this. I was mad with the berserker madness, which had once driven me to kill a bear unarmed.

Orgu dared not relax his grip. His throttling hands ground in viciously. But he no longer laughed—no! He shook his head, blinded, trying to dodge my blows, and toward the end he shrieked in stark agony as flesh was ripped from his cheeks and bone splintered. . . .

Fear came to him. He let go my throat and sprang up, a hideous, near-faceless figure. I rose, drawing air into my starved lungs—air that tore like cold knives. And I walked forward, my hands reaching for Orgu.

He could not face me. He ran back to the mouth of the cave. He screamed at me, gibbering in a panic of unendurable fear. I was Death, and that Orgu knew well.

A KNIFE lay against the wall. Orgu seized it, though by tribal law the Ordeal must be fought unarmed. Simon shouted, and my mother cried out and ran forward, but I scarcely saw the weapon. I

walked on, and I think that I would have killed Orgu even if the knife had pierced my heart.

But, as Orgu poised himself, a hand gripped the haft and tore it from his hand. Behind Orgu, outside the cave, was a stir of swift motion. The killer whirled, snarling—and a scream of abysmal fear ripped from his throat. He fell to his knees.

The ice of terror pierced through the red mist that shrouded my brain. Silhouetted against the cave mouth was a figure. And it was not—earthly!

A man stood there, and his body crawled and gleamed with silvery radiance. He was encased in living light that crept upon his skin, as if he were clothed in white moon-fires.

Behind me, Veena cried, "Eli!"

It was my brother, come back from the Haunted Land.

The Shining Man lifted the long knife and started for Orgu, but the giant had broken the paralysis of terror that gripped him. He flung himself aside, sprang past the menacing figure that towered over him. Outside the cave, Orgu rose and went reeling off into the darkness. His running footsteps died in the distance.

"Eli . . ." I said, and my throat tightened at the dead, horrible expression on that strangely altered face. He was *shining* . . . the way I had heard of others, all through childhood, the whispered, dreaded stories . . . the bidden scourge of our people.

The Shining Man had forgotten Orgu. He nodded, swaying unsteadily, and his voice was a thin, reedy whisper from far away.

"I have seen them . . ." he whispered.

The brand of some cosmic wonder was on his face. His body crept and crawled with living light. He laughed like an idiot, nodded, and went on: "I have seen the tiny folks . . . the Tuatha Dhe. I slept on the hills above the eastern sea, and they came for me and opened the Veil. I went down into their kingdom under the hills. . . ."

Simon whispered, "He has seen the little people."

"Aye," said the Shining Man, nodding idiotically. "So did my brother North. But he was warned, as I was, never to open the Black Door. The little people told me North had opened the Door, and that he was dead. But one day I, too, opened the Door, and then—then—"

His face contorted. He seemed to be looking into some frightful memory. Abruptly he screamed, flung up his arms, and fell. For a heart-beat there was utter silence as we stood there, looking down at that dreadful figure.

"Jo," Eli whispered. "They are too mighty. The magic of the ages dwells with them. Take our people and flee . . . and the terror . . . or else . . . in time . . . all will die. . . ."

All will die. The Haunted Land was real. It rose alive and evil from legend, a destroyer clad in Shining Silver. So had the legends spoken, of a Shining Death, and so had it come again after many quiet years.

Veena and Simon hurried forward. But the rest hung back. I saw my mother wince as she touched the shining skin, and I, too, knelt beside Eli. His flesh was frigid and hard as stone. He was dead, though his body still gleamed with that unearthly radiance.

My mother's harsh face was grimly set. I raised her gently and took her to the Throne. I seated her upon it, and turned to face the tribe.

"My brother has been slain," I said quietly. "Tomorrow I go to the Haunted Land to seek blood vengeance. There can be no life for us, and no peace, until the Shining Death ceases to be. While I am gone my mother rules the Merricans."

And at that Veena cried out and covered her face and wept very bitterly. . . .

A THING done has an end. I had spoken, and no arguments could dissuade me. My mother, that hard gray woman whose code was stern and unyielding as the rocks, said that she did not wish blood vengeance—and the admission was not easy to make, I knew. For to her honor was greater than love. But I think that underneath she was very tender, for she asked me to kiss her goodbye, and I could not bring myself to look into her eyes.

Also, Mira did not want me to go. It was hard to leave bronze-haired Mira, with her lithe, supple body.

"When I return, we shall marry," I told Mira as she clung to me under the trees.

"Will you return, Jo?" she asked, burying her small nose on my shoulder. "I love you so!"

I consoled her, as lovers do, and spoke of the plans we had made, which must now be postponed, but not for long. "I shall be back, brown girl," I said, "when the blood of my people and my brothers is avenged. Then we shall not be parted any more."

Simon bade me come to his cave. It was a place of wonder, tabu among the tribe. But most of Simon's magic he kept locked in boxes of wood. He showed me, once, a thing he called a book, and said the voice of a dead man was imprisoned in it.

"What does this dead man say?" I asked.

"He tells of life. His name was Wells, and he gives an outline of man's history." Then Simon spoke further, but soon it became plain to me that this Wells was either a liar or a madman. Such outlandish nonsense I have never heard. For one thing, there was mention of a war which involved the whole world, and this is manifestly ridiculous, for what could have been the good of such a fight, or the reason for it?

Most of all I liked to hear Simon tell of the Ancient Heroes—knights who existed for the sheer love of battle, but fair battle between men, or tales of giant citadels where dwelt sorcerers who could harness the lightning and travel underground in swift chariots. Now Simon welcomed me and looked at me keenly.

"So you are going to the Haunted Land," he said, nodding. "Tell me, Jo-Hagra, what do you know of this place?"

"Why, what every man knows," I replied, sitting down uncomfortably on a box. "It lies to the east, beyond the Allagaynees. People say the little folk dwell underground there, immortal and very old. They have always lived in this country, since the days of the Ancients. Now they steal our women and kill our men, although I have heard it said they are very beautiful, for—for they have no souls."

"It is an old legend," said Simon. "Well, for all I know, it may be true. And yet it may merely bide a greater truth. Jo-Hagra, have you ever heard of Manhat-tan?"

I searched my memory. "No . . . wait! Did not the gods live there once? Was it not a place that floated on the sea?"

Simon did not answer directly. He picked up a book-thing and stared at it. "I have traveled much in my youth," he said, "and, of course, I am a member of what is left of the Scientists."

"Scientists?" I was puzzled. "Do you mean magicians?"

Simon laughed a little. "Well, you call us that, Jo. At any rate, we know somewhat more of the past than most men. Is it not possible that the little folk are human—or that perhaps they did not always live underground? And certainly those who dwell in the days of the Last World War might well be soulless!"

"You mean the little folk lived in the time of the Ancients?" I asked, amazed.

"I mean their forefathers *were* the Ancients," Simon said, with slow emphasis. He made a queer, hopeless gesture. "So much is lost—so much unknown!" He looked at me and said, "Listen to me, carefully. I can tell you that what killed Eli was a form of energy called radioactivity. It is something that gives off rays like the sun. You understand? . . . Good. Well, you'll need some protection against this ray. And certain metals, such as lead, will halt it."

"I can see that you are mad," I said, bluntly enough. "Eli was, of course, enchanted. Do you expect a lead shield to turn a steel sword?"

Simon blew out his lips and said something about using a sy-cology, which I did not understand. "I am going to give you some magic weapons," he said, and brought out a suit made of flexible stuff that shone like metal.

"Will this resist a blade?" I asked skeptically. "I think it must be the lead metal."

"Yes, yes," Simon said impatiently. "It will resist other things too, which is more important. Take this, too." He gave me a coppery wand, no longer than my thumb, but a bit thicker. "The Ancients used a certain hard, transparent substance, which no longer exists, for a great many purposes. There's a diamond—a magic jewel—in that wand, which comes apart when you unscrew it. A diamond can cut through this transparent stuff the Ancients had, and you may be grateful for that."

One other weapon Simon gave me, though he hesi-

tated long before trusting the box into my hands. It was sealed and made of an opaque, shiny, white substance. "I hesitate to give you this," he said, "for it contains the essence of the greatest malice on earth. It has lain here for centuries and has never been used. But, if my books are correct, and my teachers did not err, this may prove to be the answer to the Shining Death and the little folks. My hand trembles as I give it to you."

He said more, though I understood little, and finally I formed my own conclusion that the box contained a jinee. It was dangerous magic, but I stuffed the box in my deerskin pouch and thanked Simon for it. I had no time to waste with him. The memory of Eli had come to me then and I knew what I had to do. . . .

AND so I left the Merricans and set out eastward, beyond the valleys where our tribe ranged.

I foraged as I went, killing deer, eating wild berries, and keeping a wary eye out for the wolves, which ranged in ferocious, ravenous packs everywhere. Eastward I went. At first I saw no human being. Only the unending hills, the animals, and ruins. I saw stones and corroded metal broken into shapeless heaps, nearly buried in the soil. Then, one day, as I entered a sombre valley at twilight, a cast spear grazed my arm. A chorus of yells rose all around me. Out of the bushes on every side rose men, a dozen squat, hairy, deformed beings more hideous even than Orgu. Without waiting to parley they ran at me, and more spears flashed by me as I sprang aside, stringing my bow.

These were not true men, I saw at once. They were little more than beasts, and yet with something more than a beast's cunning. And they had the ferocity and cruelty of men, which is dangerous indeed. Now I remembered that these must be the beasts whom the little folk had used. They too, had been legendary for me, and unreal, for if they had existed, what should the little folks want with my people?

Indecision tore at me. My duty was to avenge my brother. Till I had done that, I could not let myself be slain. And so I fled.

The short, gnarled legs of my enemies could not match my long strides. Once a spear tore flesh from my back, and I groaned at the blinding impulse to turn and fight. But coldly, desperately, I fought down the berserker madness that would rob me of all sanity. I ran through that dark valley, and the noise of shouting died behind me in the distance. . . .

Onward I went. Suns were born and died. I saw no more men. Only the gaunt gray wolf-packs that ranged fleetly, and at night I could hear the primitive, melancholy baying from the distance at my fire. Sometimes green eyes watched me from the shadows, till I flung burning brands and drove the wolves back.

I went on, and reached the sea.

At sundown I stood on the summit of a great, dome-

like mound, staring down at gray waters that stretched into darkness. I shivered, suddenly apprehensive. I could not have told why. Perhaps this great stretch of sea frightened me . . . different, somehow, from the great Inland Lakes, which I had once visited. I stood in the Haunted Land.

To the north a bare granite cliff rose sheer into the sky. And it seemed to me that, far and faint, a movement stirred. . . .

Eyes watched me, I thought.

But I was wrong. Though I searched, I found nothing, only a deepening twilight gloom, and the whisper of leaves in a chill wind. And above me the great ramp of the cliff rose.

I was exhausted by my journey, and I tried to find sleep, but queer dreams oppressed me. I saw Mira's face, veiled by bronze hair, and it seemed to me that she cried warning. Then the face of Orgu rose up, misshapen and hideous, and that gave place to a vision of sheer madness. I saw a city that might have been built by the gods, and fire rained down upon it from the night sky.

Suddenly I was wide awake. The embers of my fire cast a vague red glow. And standing above me was a girl.

SHE was no human maid. Slim and small and fragile as gossamer, her raven-dark hair did not reach to my waist. Her face was delicately chiseled and marble-pallid. In the great, luminous eyes dreams dwelt.

She wore a robe that might have been made from the silken wings of butterflies.

Involuntarily my hand went to my knife, but sheepishly I let it fall. What harm could come from this wee creature of the little folk?

She saw my movement and laughed gently. Her lips, soft and rose-pink as a baby's, spoke, and though the words were slurred and strange, they were Merri-can, and I understood them.

"I am Aiyana," the soft voice told me. "I have come to save you. Those who sleep here do not always waken. The—the—" She hesitated, and glanced around with fear in her eyes. "The Guardians watch always," she said. "Come, there is danger here. Outside the Veil there is always danger."

The Veil? Eli had spoken of a Veil, before he died. But who were the Guardians? I let Aiyana tug me forward, toward the ramp of the cliff that towered near by, asking no questions.

We stood beneath it, and the tiny girl reached out and fumbled over the rock surface. There was silence for an instant. Then, far away, seemingly underground, a bell tolled once and was still.

Before my eyes the cliff melted into nothingness! It wavered and rippled like water and was gone! In its place I saw a curtain of silvery, luminous mist.

"Come," Aiyana urged. "I must close the Veil swiftly."

I followed her into the mists. She was a dim shad-

ow beside me. And then, abruptly, the bell tolled again.

Swiftly I turned. I caught a glimpse of the hillside, and the red spot of my fire not far away. It seemed to me that misshapen, dark figures were moving around it—but before I could be sure, the picture wavered and faded. It was gone. Only the silver mists existed. I was in the land under the great dome.

"The Veil is closed," Aiyana said. "Follow me."

We walked together down a sloping ramp. The bright clouds whirled about me. Then, suddenly, strangely, they were gone; I stepped out into—

Into the Unknown! I cried out, and Aiyana's hand tightened upon mine. She looked up inquiringly at my face.

I did not see her. I was staring out at the immense, incredible vista that stretched before me.

For I looked upon the land of the little people—the Haunted Land!

FIVE hundred feet below me it lay. We stood on a platform from which a spiral path of green metal reached down, to end amid a grove of trees directly beneath. I could see for perhaps two miles—and then the land ended.

It ended at a wall that had no summit. The whole little country lay under a vast dome that glowed with pallid radiance. It was as though a bowl had been overturned upon it—a bowl of giant size.

From my height, it seemed as though a lovely pattern stretched out to the circumscribed horizon. I could see gardens carpeted with verdure and brilliant flowers. And there were buildings, jewel-like and beautiful. Some were white, others flashed with all colors of the rainbow. Small figures moved here and there, dwarfed by distance.

"Let us go down," Aiyana said, and I obeyed, adjusting my knapsack more easily upon my shoulders. The girl looked at me curiously.

"Why do you carry that? Throw it away!"

"No," I said stubbornly. "It contains—magic."

"Magic!"

But I interrupted her laughter. "Why did you bring me here?" I asked stubbornly. "Why did you save my life—as you say?"

"Mortals are interesting," Aiyana said, her eyes clouding. "We are happy here, but . . ." and her voice died away.

I asked quietly, "What is the Black Door?"

Aiyana halted, swung around to face me. In her eyes was the strange horror I had seen there when she spoke of the Guardians.

"So you know," she said. "Someone came back, then."

"What is this all about?" I asked. "Is there something that threatens you? For I know now that our legends are false, that the little folk are kind and gentle. What do you fear?"

Aiyana scrutinized me carefully. "Yes," she said, at length. She pointed up at the shining dome above.

"The light is not enough. It gives us immortality. We do not even need food, though sometimes we eat for pleasure. But the light is not enough. Even the Prytles are not enough. Perhaps your people . . ."

"I do not understand you," I said. "I had expected to come to the land of the little folk. We used to think they were in the Haunted Land. And then I learned that they came from the Ancients. Now tell me, what is this place called?"

"Ma'hattya."

"Manhat-tan!" I cried. "Then they are all the same—and I am in the city of the gods, the city that floated on the sea!"

"They are all the same, mortal. We are the immortals who once dwelt under the sun, even as you, until Doomsday. Then came a time when the sky was fire, and the air was death, and men flew in the air and slew with beams of light. We fled and hid under this great dome, which cannot be sundered. We are immortal, and yet . . ."

I remembered old Simon's words about the war of the whole world, and wondered, but then she took my arm and we walked again, reaching the foot of a great spiral path, like a winding stair in the earth.

I could sense some purpose in her leading me. My brain was whirling with countless questions.

"Tell me," I said, "if there is a Black Door here. For all that I have seen tells me that somewhere the book-things of Simon have erred, and that the Shining Death does not come from this wondrous land. But if there is a Black Door, then I have come right."

"And if you have?" she whispered.

"Then I must take blood revenge. I will end the thieving of our women and the killing of our men, for my people and my brothers are more important than my life."

"LOOK!"

Aiyana pointed down the great spiral on which we walked, like a stairway in the earth, and below us I saw many little folk coming to meet us. They ran on the moss-like grass, past a rose-pink fountain, and we came together near a building shaped like a shell.

I have no words to describe them. Fragile, tiny and delicate they were, all beautiful and all with the large, luminous eyes of Aiyana. They ringed us, laughing and playing and pointing to me.

Then, all at once, from somewhere the deep-toned bell I had heard before rang out, once, then again. Suddenly the little folk stopped laughing. I looked into their eyes and I shuddered inwardly, for they were not innocent—no! A moment later they were running away and their laughter had returned.

"Are these the people on whom you have come to take blood revenge?" said Aiyana, beside me. I flushed with shame.

"Once and for all," I cried, "tell me if I have come right. This land is not for me. I have—"

"You are right. The Black Door is here. Your brother North came here and then Eli. He must have

been the one who escaped. And you too are marked for the . . ." But she could not utter the words I knew should follow—the Shining Death! "Stay here forever, Jo-Hagra. I will save you!" She stood before me, breathlessly beautiful, in the garden of scarlet blossoms.

There were no words in me. A great sorrow swept through me, yet I could not understand. I tried to remember other things that old Simon had told me, things about the world that had warred, thinking perhaps there lay the answer. But it was futile, and the blood-lust was rising in me, the beserker madness returning. Here was the land that had been Death for—

"Answer quickly!" Aiyana begged. "There is no time now. The bell sounded moments ago, and the Prytles have come for you."

"No!" I shouted. "By Lincoln, no! Show me the Black Door. Lead me to your ruler, so I may challenge him to an ordeal!"

Swiftly Aiyana stepped back. "The Prytles are here!" she cried. "Now you shall see the Black Door."

I spun around. Too late. I heard a rustle of movement even before I saw the shaggy creatures Aiyana had called Prytles—and they were the same beasts who had fought me on my way to the Haunted Land. I heard a harsh command, and the blur of shadowy figures overwhelmed me. My feet were jerked from under. A heel drove into my side. And then the sweaty, hairy bodies recoiled and I looked up.

There among the many savages stood Orgu!

"Thank you, Aiyana," he growled, bowing to the little one. "These Prytles are over-eager for Jo-Hagra, but he belongs to me."

He lowered his ugly head close to me. "You shall die, Jo-Hagra," he snarled. I lifted my head and spat into his eyes. With a roar he lunged for me, his hands like claws, reaching for my throat.

"Stop!"

It was the pealing voice of Aiyana that had called. Almost instantly, the grip on my shoulders relaxed. Red-eyed, slaving, Orgu looked down at me, then at Aiyana as her voice came again. "He is not yours to kill! Take him to the Keepers."

Slowly, Orgu rose. There was no meaning in anything that happened, but I did not wait. I lashed out and caught Orgu's jaw, then followed him down and tore his face with my hands. But I had had time enough for only two blows when the beasts seized me from all sides, holding me firmly in their great number.

They dragged me to my feet, and one of them thrust a round collar of iron around my neck. Leading from the collar were many chains. Each of the savages whom Aiyana had called Prytles took an end of these chains, and thus I stood, like an animal, in the center of a circle. Should I try to move in any direction, the chains in the other direction would drag me back.

Now I faced Aiyana and said, "Is this how you

would save me? Are you and this scum called Orgu in league? Truly then, I will destroy you all."

Instead of answering, Aiyana laughed, and the sound of her voice was like a knife. "Take the fool away," she screamed. "Away!"

HOW many hours passed I had no way of knowing. There was time to sleep once, but since the cell in which I had been put was shut off from the light of day, I could not measure the time. Light came from somewhere, but it was not the sun; that I knew. There were no signs of life anywhere near me, and I lay on the floor of an empty chamber, my mind filled with strange thoughts. The cell I was in had no boundaries that I could see, yet if I went too far in any direction, a hard, transparent substance hit me in the face. I could run my hands on it, feel its smooth surface, but that was all.

Then I heard Aiyana again, heard her before she was in sight. She was singing, and her voice echoed down the beautiful halls of colored stone. When she was closer, I could hear the words. It was a song she had made up about me. Part of it went—

"... so the young dolt listened with his savage ears
And the words were like sunlight to him,
Listening with his heart and not his mind
Threatening a revenge on the city of immortals ..."

Then she was standing before me, just outside the invisible walls of my cell, and a strange radiance lit all the area around her, and she was smiling, softly, intimately.

Then I thought: she was playing a part before. Unable to stand against Orgu, for Orgu was obviously in league with the rulers of this land—else how could he have gotten there at all—she had pretended to be my enemy. But that was impossible. She had been a friend.

"Now, Jo-Hagra," she said, slowly. "Where is your blood revenge? Even now the Council debates your fate, as once they did for your brother North, and again for Eli. It is not often a tribal ruler of the mortals comes to us of himself. And tribal leaders, unlike simpler mortals who must slave underground, always go to the Black Door."

"Are we alone?" I said.

"Quite."

"Then what you are saying must be true, and not intended for the ears of an enemy."

"True?" Her laughter rang again. "Of course it's true. Did you think I meant what I said to you in the scarlet garden? I was hut waiting for the arrival of the Prytles, for we little folk have no means against the mortals. The savages listen well enough, but a mortal is another matter. So I gave you words of sunlight, to hold you."

"I do not believe you," I said. "You are an immortal, but you are not far different from other women, and I have heard it said that it is better to fight the devil than scorn a woman. You meant what you

said, but now you are furious."

Strangely, Aiyana only smiled, entirely undisturbed. "You do not know our people," she said, softly. There was the faint suggestion of a sad smile on her face as she continued. "We are immortal, but we can die—when we want to die by our own hands. And in these recent years, so many of us have gone that way. Perhaps we need new blood—or something that comes from new blood. Here anyone can be immortal. Your women are needed by the slaves who live in our underground, and your men have courage and stout hearts." The smile had gone, and in its stead had come a harsher expression, much like a fierce hope that was unholy, lighting her eyes as she spoke words I could not understand. "Those too, we know we can take away. You saw your brother Eli, you thought, but he was a shell."

"And Orgu?" I said. "He helps your diabolical scheme against his own people."

"For reasons of his own," said Aiyana, her beautiful smile flashing. "For an occasional addition to his wives within his city."

So that was the explanation of Orgu's life away from the tribe. And the explanation of Aiyana knowing my name. Orgu had told her, or others in the Haunted Land, of me, and they had known I would come.

"TELL me," I said, "if you love me honestly, for then—"

"Be quiet!" she flared. "With my own hands will I pluck the heart from you as it shines in the chamber beyond the Black Door."

And now, looking at her, I knew she meant it, and that she had been speaking the truth. Hopelessly, I rushed for her, and the unseen wall smashed into my face and blood ran down my temple. I could remember now the things Simon the Elder had said, of a world that had fought itself senselessly, age after age, even as Aiyana had said. She was a being from a world that had known only war, treachery, malice, cunning. The motives for these evils no longer existed, but the little folk were cruel without motive, thoughtless as they inflicted pain. Whatever use we mortals were to these folk was coincidental; they robbed us and killed for the joy, hidden though it was.

"Why do you come here?" I shouted.

"To taunt you. To drive you wild. To watch you tear your hair."

And then she approached closer—and her hand extended through where I thought there was a wall, and she hit me in the side of my face. When I sprang back, the wall was there again, but then I understood. There was a small space in the wall, otherwise how could we speak?

And now, through the wall, I heard the soft patter of feet. I should have restrained my glance, for Aiyana's ears were not as discerning as mine, but when I looked to one side, she did too, and all was lost.

For Mira—my Mira—was running toward us!

"STAY back!" I shouted. If Mira heard, she did not hearken. Her bronze hair streaming behind her, she was beside Aiyana in a moment. One of her hands flashed swiftly. There was a slender knife in it, and before the vicious little Aiyana could move or make an outcry, she was held firmly by Mira's arms, the knife inches from her throat. As the knife started to descend I cried out again, and in the momentary hesitation, Aiyana went limp. She had fainted!

Quickly, Mira let her slump to the floor and started towards me, her eyes shining, her bosom heaving with exertion.

"Now," she cried, "follow me, for I have learned the way through the Veil, where—"

Stupidly, I had not warned Mira of the unseen wall and she had walked directly into it. The blow sent her back with a cry of pain.

"I can't get out," I called to her. "There is a wall here that no eye can see—the wall that struck you."

Unsteadily, Mira came back again, slower this time, until her outstretched hand felt the wall. Her eyes widened in disbelief as she let her hands slide along the contours of the wall around me.

"I thought you had been enchanted when I saw you standing here, talking to her—"

And as she mentioned Aiyana, we both turned to look at the little immortal, for we had moved completely around in a circle—but Aiyana was gone. She had slipped out.

"How did you follow me?" I said, "and why?" For the first time I felt despondent. For myself, I knew that in some way I would have worked out a salvation. My life had been full of trials, and great danger had often dwelt beside me. But now, with Mira, resolute and courageous though she was, the danger was magnified many times. "Oh, Mira," I said, "now indeed all may be lost."

But Mira cried, "The magic—Simon told me of it when I left to follow you—perhaps the metal suit may allow you to walk through this wall. Quickly, my love."

I needed no urging. From the sack that I still carried, I took out the suit. It seemed far too small, but as I put it on, I realized that it was of a composition that stretched. Then, clad in the metal-gray suit, I advanced to the wall. It was no use. The magic had failed. The wall would not give, though I pounded it.

The next moment the sound of many feet came to us. There was nowhere for Mira to hide. A swarm of Prytles ran in and with harsh shouts, they seized Mira, who offered no resistance.

Helpless, I watched Orgu and Aiyana enter the chamber. Behind them were several others of the little folk, all jabbering excitedly. Orgu laughed loudly. "See the fool in an old man's magic!" And approaching closer to me he spat. But the unseen wall caught the moisture from his foul lips, and it hung there in mid-air, then ran down to the ground, as if on a path.

Now Orgu, as much as I myself, and the Prytles, looked at it in wonder. When I tried to touch it, there was no wetness.

"Take the savage to the underground!" Aiyana called, impatiently. "Give her there to those who would be mated." The Prytles, who had kept clear of me, although doubtless wondering why I had not come to the rescue of Mira, led Mira from the chamber.

As she left, her eyes filled with tears, she cried out to me, "Do not lose hope, Jo-Hagra! I love you."

I LOOKED after her until she was gone. Then Aiyana spoke. "Go now, Orgu. Leave me with this mortal." A moment later Aiyana said to me, "The Council has instructed me to tell you that the glorious fate of tribal chiefs will be yours. After the brilliant light of the Shining Death has reduced your body to a glowing mass, you will be used in the lamps that glow in the chambers of our wise men, so that they may gain some of the wild qualities that surge in your breast. Now let your magic help you. Take that little stick from the floor and beat the walls around you."

With her last words still echoing within my cell, Aiyana left. Now, I thought, many of the things that I had not known were becoming clear to me. I felt I had been a fool and cursed myself bitterly, for what use had I been to my people? And I had even failed at the almost sacred blood revenge.

Sitting there in the stiff leaden suit that old Simon had given me, I laughed. The beserker madness was welling up within me, and I fought to keep calm, but it was useless. As useless as the little stick that Aiyana had pointed to, lying there near me, where it had fallen from my sack as I took out the suit. As useless—

But then my blood chilled—and I remembered something of what Simon had said . . . "a certain hard, transparent substance . . . a magic jewel . . ."

Perhaps, I thought, perhaps! If there could be a small space in the wall, there could be a larger one, if one knew how to make it. Had Mira and I used the wrong magic? Was that little stick—Simon had called it a magic wand—was that the right magic? Hurriedly I seized the stick and began to turn it this way and that. Then one end began to twist away from the other, so that the top cunningly came off—and there in the head of the stick was a white stone that seemed first colorless, and then filled with all the colors of the sunset. A diamond, Simon had called it. It felt hard and smooth to the touch.

Holding it before me, I walked towards the wall. When I felt the force there, I held the diamond against the wall, but nothing happened. But I pressed, and there was a white mark hanging in mid-air, where the stick had stopped. I moved the stick down, and a long white line formed in mid-air, to mark the progress of my arm. I cut to one side, then up again, and finally joined the sides at the top, until I had outlined a long square that hung there like the mark of a door.

It was difficult work. The stick made a slight

scratching sound as it moved. When I had finished I put my hand against the door I had made. The wall was still there!

For moments I had been feeling new hope sweep through me, and now I was sickened inside again. Almost crying with rage, I leaned my body against the wall, wearily. Suddenly I was falling—through the wall! I went beadlong to the floor, my feet swept from under me by the part of the wall that remained, for the door had started several feet from the ground.

In an instant I was up. There on the floor lay a section of bard, transparent substance the exact size and shape of the door I had marked with the—the magic wand.

I was free again!

THERE was no time to take off the useless leaden suit, so I scooped up the sack, put it on my back again and went back the way I had been brought there. I reached the entrance to the building and looked out. It was late twilight. Far to one side, the golden sun shone through the dome, which I now surmised was made of the same substance that had composed my cell. Truly these people of the Haunted Land of Manhat-tan, these immortals were great, for who could have made such a thing?

The landscape was deserted now, though here and there I heard voices that tinkled like bells, and although the sun was departing, light, soft and pale, glowed from everywhere. The flowers and trees and the mossy grass were lovely; the many buildings were marvelous to behold. But I had no time for contemplation. Somewhere Mira was a prisoner—or worse—and Aiyana had said she was going underground.

Under the ground? Had these little folk also hollowed out the earth? I had to know, and if it proved so, to go there. Bending over to reduce my height, I ran along the grass, looking for a hole in the ground.

By some instinct I seemed to be drawn to the spot where I had first come from, and there I spied my longbow and quiver of arrows. No one had taken them. Thankfully I slung them across my shoulders and took a new direction.

I must have wandered about for more than two hours, but I saw nothing. The wonders and the terrors of this land were a closed world to me. How I wished for the knowledge that was Simon's, so I might be able to meet these immortals as an equal! It seemed a hopeless task I had set myself.

But then I remembered a trick of the hunter. When I had hunted bear, often the easiest way to find one was to go near their feeding ground. After that, one might go his way, confident that a bear would follow as soon as he had picked up the scent. That was my answer. If I wanted the under-the-ground place, the best way was to be led there—and the way to do that was to get some immortals who did not know me, to capture me, and not knowing I was a tribal chief take me where other mortals went. Then I would plan again, once I knew where Mira was. I had great

faith now in Simon's magic stick.

I approached one of the buildings where I heard many voices. There was singing and laughter coming out, and as I turned around a wall, I saw a large group of the little folk.

"It is a mortal who stands here!" I shouted. Their frightened faces turned towards me, and in a moment all was confusion. With high-pitched screams they began to run back inside, but some broke away over the grass toward another building. Surprised at what had happened, but determined to be caught, I gave chase. With several large strides I had caught up to the hindmost of the immortals. I grabbed the little fellow and swung him up to my eye level. He was squealing with terror.

"I am your prisoner," I said. "Conduct me to the under-the-ground, for that is where all mortals go."

But instead of ordering me to follow him, the little man only wept and cried in fright. I realized I was still wearing the leaden suit.

"Conduct me to the under-the-ground," I said again. "I am but a mortal, though I wear this suit made of metal."

"No," he screamed, tossing his silken head about, "no, the mortals there would imprison me!"

Here was something new: an immortal afraid of a lesser being!

"Then show me the way," I said, gently, and I lowered him to the ground, keeping a hand on his shoulders. He could scarcely walk, but in a few moments we turned to a large edifice that stood in the ground like a white mountain. In the center was a closed door. The little man pointed to it, and as I let him go, he scampered away. Short cries greeted him and I realized that the shrubs and trees around me had been alive with little folk anxiously watching our progress.

I opened the door. There was a small room there, and as I stepped in, the door closed behind me. Suddenly the floor trembled under my feet and I felt the room sinking. Faster and faster it went and dizziness tore at my brain and my stomach ached. I was falling in a pit—the room was a trap!

Amazingly, I felt pressure on my calves, and I felt the room slowing in its descent. The sense of movement died. A door before me opened by itself.

SO terrific was the vision that met my eyes, that at first I was conscious of nothing but blinding light and roaring sound, a tumult that sent me reeling back against the wall. The flames of lightning were in this glare; thunder-crash was in the bellowing that smashed on my ears. I flung up my hand to shield my eyes, certain that I would be annihilated any moment.

But the moments passed, and I still lived.

Once more I looked on the scene. I was conscious now that the light was not steady; it pulsed and waned rhythmically. The sound, too, waxed and rose again to a deafening tumult. I looked at a vast cav-

ern, and through a gap in the farther wall I saw another cavern, equally large, and yet another, stretching into the far distance.

Crouched in the huge room were metal giants!

They were mountains that throbbed and shuddered with living thunder. Mighty wheels spun dizzily; shining rods rose and fell; lightning flashed from great towers that rose toward the rock roof. It was an inferno, a maelstrom of giants' playthings. But those who walked among the metal mountains were not giants. They were men.

Strange men, smaller than I, but well muscled and scantily clad in leather garments. They moved with strangely mechanical strides, and no expression crossed the gray, hairless faces. The room was filled with the gray men, serving the living, iron mountains. They pushed levers and spun wheels; they tended their charges like slaves. And when one turned toward me, I saw that his eyes were dull and without soul.

Looking farther past him, I saw one of the Prytl standing stock-still, regarding me, as if his slow wits could not recall who I was. As our eyes met, he uttered a loud cry in a meaningless jargon. Immediately every eye was on me.

Slowly the gray men began to surge forward. I ducked under one of the metal mountains, where, through gaps in the iron hide of the thing, I saw a whir of swift movement and blue sparks whirling. With a single motion I fitted an arrow to my bow. As the first of the gray men wheeled and came toward me, the arrow sang a song of death. The gray man fell on the arrow that stuck from his heart. The one behind staggered back with an arrow jutting from an eye-socket, the blood gushing down his face.

The unarmed Prytl, seeing what was happening, shouted something that sounded as harsh as a string of curses. The gray men slowly fell back, moving out of the cavern and out of sight, leaving me alone. On sudden thought, I tried to open the door leading to the room which had dropped me here. It was tightly closed. There was no way out now, even if I had wanted it before I had found Mira, and I hadn't.

I started walking through the cavern, not knowing where to go, when I was greeted by a yell that rose above the continual thunder of the place. A new band of the gray men was sweeping toward me, and in their hands they held glowing sticks.

Sensing their purpose I seized the magic stick that Simon had given me and waited for them. But they did not come to take me. When they were a few feet away they stopped, and the sticks in their hands took on a fierce white light. They pointed the sticks directly at me, and bright rays of light fell on me. I did the same with my stick, but no light came from it.

For a moment I despaired, then, as I caught the dismay on the gray men's faces, I realized I had won. Even though no light came from the magic wand, it was stronger than theirs, as the unseen wall had been stronger than other walls. Again and again the lights

ran over me but I felt nothing. New strength coursed in me, and I advanced, holding the stick before me. The gray men fell back and seemed on the point of breaking in disorder, when—

Orgu came rushing past them, up in their front ranks. In a glance he saw what was happening, but strangely, he shouted, "The suit—tear it from him!" *The suit!* Was that the magic, and not the stick? Of course. There was a magic for everything. As I saw the fear on the gray men's faces, inwardly I blessed old Simon, then I called out.

"Come and tear it off by yourself, O fearless Orgu!" But without waiting, I threw the stick to the ground and leaped at him. Laughing exultantly, I could scarcely feel him through the leaden suit. I seized his throat and pushed him back to one of the iron mountains. His eyes were popping from his head and a hand swung up, holding an iron stick. I ducked and gripped his arm, and with a lunge, I brought it down against my knee. I had broken the arm.

But just as I stepped toward him again, he fell away and suddenly he touched one of the spinning organs of the living iron mountain. It caught him up and threw him shoulder high. Screaming horribly, Orgu was being sucked into the mountain, probably to be eaten, when I gripped his arms and pulled with all my strength. Great grunts came from the Iron Creature, and it cast off blue sparks of fire. The noise was enough to make me feel faint. The sweat coursed down me and my back felt it would break under the pull of the iron monster, and slowly, slowly, I kept fighting and won.

I pulled Orgu out from the monster's mouth. Both his legs had been crushed by iron teeth. He was not bleeding, but his legs were mangled as if a bear that was not hungry had tried to destroy him.

I stood over him. "Where is Mira?" I said.

He would not answer. His mouth was open in a horrible grimace, and spittle drooled from his lips. I knew he would not live long. "Tell me where is Mira and how I must go to leave here," I said, "or I will feed you to the living mountain again."

Orgu could scarcely speak, but he raised a hand and pointed. "A cavern leads . . . beyond this . . . in the purple glow. . . ." His breath was too short now for him to speak. His eyes were rolling in fear. Part of my blood revenge had been taken.

I left him and walked through the gray men. They were standing there as if enchanted, and as I walked by them, they lowered their eyes to the ground and moved aside.

At the end of the cavern there was a wide passage. I followed it along until it led into an immense cavern. There were little pin-points of light here and there in the cavern, but not the purple glow. Perplexed, I stayed in the passage and kept walking. Then I heard other footsteps. I stood close against a wall and waited.

Perhaps a hundred feet from me I saw a Prytl come

into view, and he saw me at the same instant. Although I feared little now of these people under the ground or the Prytls, new discovery would lead to more fighting, and perhaps there was a magic that I could not overcome. The gray man would not stay immobile long, and if the Prytl escaped to give my location, I might be caught.

All this I thought in the instant as we faced each other. Then abruptly, the Prytl took to his heels and I after him. Down the cavern we raced, with my long strides quickly overtaking him, but when I was but a few paces away, he whirled and ran through a door, slamming it after him. I followed in a second—and found myself in a great chamber that was illuminated by a soft purple glow—the place where Orgu had directed me!

But there was no sign of the Prytl, and for good reason. The chamber was pierced by some two-score and ten doors! It seemed to be centrally located among all the caverns of this under-the-ground world, yet there was nothing there at all.

Wondering, I stepped forward, and as I did so, I felt something move under my feet. It was a tiny knob, stuck in the floor. The next instant I saw the ground yawning before me, and from the black bowels of the earth there rose a huge pedestal. On it was a great ball of stone which gave off a marvelous purple light. It rose until it towered over me, then stopped. The stone was a flawless, brilliant thing, and it looked as if one could see into it, seeing there the imprisoned flames of a tame fire, flames that moved slowly in no apparent order.

And then I heard a voice—a warm, yet somehow inhuman voice, say, "You will never escape Manhattan."

I whirled, fingering my bow. But for the luminous stone, I was alone in the great chamber.

"Who are you?" I said. "Where are you?"

"I am the crystal," the voice said—only now I thought I was not really hearing a voice except in my head. "I am the library brain. I give information when it is needed."

This was magic indeed. I adjusted the knapsack across my shoulders and walked forward warily. "Are you alive?" I whispered.

"I am a machine. I am the greatest machine of all time. Without me the city of the immortals would be a ruin tomorrow. My ten thousand eyes see everywhere, my ears record everything, my reflexes co-ordinate all. Within me lies the knowledge of all mankind, and of the immortals."

"I do not understand," I said. "If you are not alive, then who made you?"

"The Scientists," said the voice in my head. For some reason I shivered. Though there was but one question uppermost in my mind—Mira—still a thousand confused questions were burning within me. I had begun to think strange thoughts. I had begun to see new things.

"Why do men live under the ground?" I said.

"They have lived here for ages. They are the mindless ones, and they tend the great machines that keep the city alive. Centuries ago, the Scientists of Manhattan created this great unit, needing no direction or repair from outside sources. The radiation from the quartz glassine dome sustains life indefinitely. Air is created and sent to the upper levels. All the work of the city is done here. The mindless ones have never seen the earth's surface. They know only work, and when something goes wrong, they come to me for an answer."

"But why do the immortals fear them?"

"The mindless ones have inherited an unreasoning hatred for those descended from their masters. When the immortals, in the past half century, found it necessary to come below, they could not come here themselves, so they sent the Prytls, who were fierce enough to wage successful combat and carry out orders."

"Orders?" I asked. "What do the Prytls do?"

"Outside the dome, directed by a few immortals who alone are physically fit to venture there, the Prytls steal mates for the mindless ones. Underground, the Prytls take mortals to the Radioactive Chambers, through the room with the Black Door."

"Then there is a Black Door!" I cried.

"You will be within it soon."

"NEVER!" I cried. Then cautiously I added, "I meant no offense, O mighty giver of answers. But tell me this: what is the purpose of a radioactive chamber?"

"Centuries ago its purpose was a manifold one. It was a source of power and light. It was adapted to surgery. It fought disease. When the dome was built, they needed no more light, and the machines gave power. And since the Ancients killed all disease, it had no more uses for the immortals. I know many other uses, but I have not been asked. Now the chambers are used in a way that even I do not understand. The immortals have been dying of their own hands, and they believe that if they decompose the body of a strong-willed and vigorous mortal, transforming him into small radioactive particles, that the rays of a lamp lit by the particles will give them the qualities of that man. This, they believe, will end the increasing tendency to suicide."

"I do not understand this, for I know, in my vast knowledge, that this is akin to a belief once old and once held by men who ate others, thinking they would thus receive the good qualities of the eaten ones. Such thoughts were disapproved of by the Scientists, and they were known as superstitions."

I shuddered. "Why do not the Scientists end this practice?"

"The last Scientist died twenty-two hundred years ago."

The answer was as if a sudden lamp had been turned on. Twenty-two centuries had gone by since the learned men—for such the Scientists had been, I now knew—had died, and with them, this world had

died. It had rotted away, until the immortals were no greater than the Prytlis whom they used to keep up a city that was run by mindless slaves. The course of life had passed them by, and they lived in a time of long ago. Perhaps that was why they killed themselves, for I could see no reason for their living. This, then, was the reason behind the Shining Death!

I remember I stood there like a child, trembling, eager to go on, yet with each passing moment, I feared the return of the Prytl.

"That answer I know too," said the great crystal. "You need not fear anyone here, since you will be caught by the immortals. They have not fought in countless ages, but the immortal Aiyana sent Prytlis here to ask me of the weapons in the dusty museums of Manhattan."

"Thank you, O answerer," I said. "But I have mighty magic in my sack. Simon the Elder is a Scientist and he gave me a magic wand, a suit of lead and a box that contains a jinee that is the essence of malice. Now, if you will tell me quickly where I may find Mira, I will leave."

"I do not know Mira."

"But you must, O answer-giver. Mira is my betrothed, and she was given to the mindless ones, to be the—the mate of one."

"Mortal women are taken to the great cavern in which the mindless ones live, there to dwell with them in the darkness."

I knew then that I had passed Mira on my way here; she was in the immense cavern where I had seen a few tiny lights flicker.

I bowed low and went out through the door by which I had come. It was as the Crystal had said. No one molested me; indeed I saw no sign of life. Now I hurried again to free her, yet I could not feel anger against the mindless ones, but only a loathing and pity.

AS I came to the place where the passage dipped into the great cavern, I almost stumbled over several of the gray men. Instantly the darkness was lit up by a score of the little wands they carried, but the magic was useless. I lunged for the nearest one and smashed him against the wall. Then I took the wand, to use it as a light in the darkness. But as I flashed it on one of the gray men, he seemed to be devoured by a sudden white blaze!

I stood still a moment, seeing the agony on the wretch's face, watching the silver light dance on him even after I had quickly moved away the wand. Slowly he began to shine with a radiance that brought back a horrible memory. I gritted my teeth and went ahead, and in the darkness outside the light of my wand, I heard the retreat of running feet.

Not far from where I had entered I saw the first of the dwellings of the mindless ones. They were nothing more than shallow caves hollowed out of the enormous sides of the cavern. Before I knew what I had done, I had turned the wand on two or three as they lay asleep in their caves, but I had not meant

to do that; I was looking only for Mira. Now a new difficulty had arisen. Without the wand I could not see, and if I used it, its touch was the hand of death.

I kept the wand pointed to the floor, peering ahead through the dim reflection. The cavern was large enough for many thousands of beings to have lived there, in utter darkness, with the dank smell of earth and rock everywhere. Now and again I saw a woman who looked as though she might once have come from the world of mortals, from my own world of the rolling hills. Their empty eyes would catch the light of the wand, and they looked at me dumbly as I passed on.

Staying close to the wall, I made out a faint orange glow somewhere ahead. The cavern wall turned abruptly and at once I was before a small fire coming from a little cave to one side. Venturing in, I had time only to see the vague shadows of several recumbent figures lying near the fire, for the bright glare hurt my eyes, when suddenly something leaped at me from behind and an arm flashed around my neck. In the quick attack, the bright wand fell from my grasp. A bright sliver of metal gleamed before me and then it plunged down to my heart!

But the leaden suit withstood the blow, and I spun about. I felt my hands seizing a throat, and I dug my fingers in deeply, anger rising up in me like a river. A sudden kick to my groin almost doubled me with pain, and as I let go and ducked away, the foot caught me on my temple and threw me to the ground. Even as the figure leaped, the knife again upraised, I shot upward from the ground, up and underneath the figure, seizing the legs. With a sudden spin, I turned my adversary about and brought my fist down on his face. The one blow had done its work; he lay quiet—

"Mira!" I shouted. For it was Mira who lay there before me.

Her nose was bleeding, and her bronze hair, like an aura in the light of the fire, lay wildly around her still face. I slapped her gently until her eyes flickered open. They stayed on my face, unmoving, then closed.

"Mira," I said quietly. "It is Jo-Hagra."

Slowly she began to weep. In confusion I looked about me. The still figures around the fire had not moved. The wand that had fallen was trained on one of them, and the body had begun to shine brightly. And then I saw that they were all gray men, the mindless ones—and they were all dead.

When I looked again at Mira, her eyes were open and she was staring at me. The soles were stopping now. She raised a hand and brought it slowly to my face, letting her fingers touch my lips. "It is you, Jo-Hagra," she whispered faintly. "I thought I had gone mad."

I CLEANED the blood from her face and tried to keep her quiet, but the words tumbled from her lips. "I made a fire with my stones and burned moss from the walls. I dared not fall asleep, but waited close to the mouth of the cave, and as each of these

beasts came in, I killed." She repeated the words again and again. "I killed and killed."

Now suddenly I wanted to laugh exultantly, for she had made me feel strong, but then I said to Mira, for I had always been honest with her, "We must leave here quickly, but I do not know the way to go."

Strangely, Mira was silent a moment before she said, "I know the way out. I found it when I tried to escape here. But I would not leave without you, and I had no way of finding you."

I looked at her, then said, "Thank you, Mira. But you should be joyous, yet your face is troubled."

"I found your brother North," she said.

"Alive?"

"Neither dead nor alive."

"Where?"

"In the room through the Black Door."

It was all I could do to hold myself. I could not trust my voice. I had to whisper. "Will you take me there, Mira?"

She rose and took my hand. "Come, Jo-Hagra," she said.

We went along through dark passages, guided only by the wand which I had taken up again, until we reached the great chambers where the iron monsters lived. When the gray men saw us, they did nothing, for the Prytles were not there to goad them. Only one of them made any movement, and that was a slight edging toward Mira, but I pushed him aside and he returned to his tasks. Looking down the chamber, at the far end I saw the body of Orgu. It was still lying where I had left it.

Next to this chamber was still another, and beyond that we came to a long passage, with walls that were as smooth as stone when a river has run over it. The passage was narrow and close, and at the end of it there was a small black door.

"Shield your eyes," said Mira, when we came to it. "And summon your strength."

I swung the door open. The light was pure white, brighter a thousand times than that which had come from the wands. Slowly I moved my hands away from my eyes. From the ceiling, high overhead, piercing eyes shone down, to concentrate on a small row of tall boxes. At the bottom of one of the boxes was a round vessel that glowed with heat.

I walked toward the boxes. Mira held me tightly. In one of them I saw my brother North. I knew him though there was not much left of him. The skin was shrunken against his skull. His eyes were like those of a bird, bright and hard and staring into space. He was straight and tall, and every bone stood out. In the vessel underneath the box were countless bits of shining substance, like grains of sand which glowed like white embers.

In the box beside this one there was a strange haziness in the air. It seemed to form an image, like the figures that our drawers made on slate, and which lingered long after they had been rubbed out. Looking on, I knew that here my brother Eli had been.

Somehow he had escaped, but not until the life had been sacked from him.

I wept unashamed as I stood there. This was what the immortals had done, the great people of the city that floated on the sea. No, this was truly a Haunted Land, and the Shining Death was its badge! They were lower than the Prytles, lower than the cruellest animal of the forest, for they were human in semblance and monsters in their minds. A whole people had been kept chained in slavery, to live under the ground, to serve them. They preyed on everything that lived, for they were dying.

I prayed then to the god whom we mortals believed in, the god of the trees and rivers and children, prayed that he might show me the way to overcome the enemies of those to whom life had meaning.

MIRA led me farther into the chamber where a little room was. When we entered, a door closed us in and again I felt the motion of a whole room as it shot upward. But when the room had stopped moving, and I knew we had come to the surface again, I stopped Mira from opening the door. I remembered the words of the great crystal stone. The immortals had gone to get new weapons. They were waiting.

I opened the door a little. Immediately many hands grasped it, and before I could move it hack, it had been swung open. Outside it was daylight again, and before us were a great throng of the Immortals, singing and jabbering. Their shouts echoed through the land and answers returned. I knew then that they had been watching every way out of the under-the-ground, and they were ready for us.

All at once cheers rang out, and I saw a throng of Prytles coming. They were pushing something mounted on a platform on wheels. It was a long, hollow piece of metal, as if a log had been hollowed out, and it rested on a square base. One of the Prytles was pushing balls of iron into the hollow end of the iron, and another had made fire which he held on a torch.

And directing everything was—Aiyana.

Standing as we were, like animals in a cage open at one side, there could be little safety. I did not understand what was happening, but I feared for Mira. I was safe in my magic suit, and the wand—

Suddenly I pointed it at one of the immortals. Its light, so feeble under the sun, only made the little man laugh, and now all were laughing louder and louder. It was a useless magic against immortals.

Above their voices, Aiyana was making herself heard. "Away!" she cried. "When the cannonade of the forefathers of the Ancients is heard, all in its path are destroyed." There were groups of ornately dressed little folk around her, but she seemed to have a great authority, for she had been the one who had taken me through the Veil. She stood there, a beautiful creature, her lips curled in scorn, and her whole being one of sheer malice.

Malice. The thought was like a blow. I remembered

old Simon's words again, and the white box in my sack, the box that contained the "essence of malice." Quickly I found it and held it aloft.

"Listen to me!" I cried. "I have a great and dangerous magic in my hand, a powerful jinee. If you do not allow us to go free—"

It was impossible to continue in the uproar. Aiyana herself turned away and took the torch from the Prytl who held it. Even as she brought it down to the hollow iron, I jumped in front of Mira and opened the little box in my hand. There was nothing in it but a black powder!

The next instant my ears were shattered by a noise that was like knives in my brain. A great red flame leaped up and the world seemed to be filled with bits of flying metal. Overhead the wind whistled as if with a thousand birds. The ground was torn up and trees fell. And then I felt the hot pain that seared my arm through my leaden suit, and saw the blood run out. Mira had not been touched; I was thankful for that!

"You're hurt!" Mira cried, taking my arm.

"It is nothing," I said. "Wolves have often wounded me more deeply. The hollow iron was strange magic to them—they pointed it awry. . . ."

But I was watching the little boy that had fallen from my hand. The black powder had spilled and now it rose up in an ever-growing cloud and moved quicker than the eye could follow.

And as the cloud moved away, wherever it had been—the little folk dropped to the ground and were still. It was as if in that black cloud dwelt Death itself. . . .

I ran forward to the nearest of the fallen people. Strangely, the Prytls were unharmed. They stood about stupidly, looking on at what had happened, babbling quietly to each other. They knew too well the strange mortal in the leaden suit, the mortal they could not overcome. As if in fear of an infinitely greater danger, they seemed unafraid of me, but moved aside as I came close.

The little man I looked at was the one at whom I had pointed the wand, and who had laughed so much. Now he was still. His face and hands, and all the exposed parts of his body, were covered with a black growth that seemed alive, that was growing and moving even as I looked on. It was a ghastly, repugnant sight.

I walked to the others, with Mira silent beside me. They were all dead. Near the hollow iron Aiyana lay where she had fallen. Her eyes were still open, and they were looking at me. As if in a dream I heard her speak. "Your . . . magic . . . was . . . great," she breathed and her face was lit with an unholy light, as if with her death all the dormant wickedness had risen to the surface.

"She was stronger than the others," said Mira,

quietly. "She used to go outside the Veil, and that had given her a strength and a power to fight that most of her people did not have."

"What do you know of this?" I turned to Mira.

"Simon the Elder told me," she said. "You did not wholly believe the things he told you, but I did. He told me of this great magic, told me how the Ancient Scientists had conquered an age-old enemy. The little box held something he called a jirm, which had been captured from a conquered jinee known as a Black Plague. He said that the rigorous life of mortals had made them immune to it, but—"

"Yes," I said to her. "We mortals were stronger. The little folk had lived here away from the world, shut off by this great bowl, to live a sealed life. The first touch of life that called for a struggle to survive, found them unable to meet it, unfit to live. . . ."

I had not taken my eyes from Aiyana's lovely face. Her eyes were closing now, and she had stopped breathing.

The bright flowers were jewels on the slopes, but the song of the fountains was a mockery now. The little folk had gone to their last and eternal slumber, and perhaps Death had come quickly and mercifully for them, as a friend. Under the ground the iron monsters would still be roaring for awhile, until the last of the gray men had left them untended. I wondered whether we mortals would ever learn their secret—and suddenly I *knew* we would. . . .

In the distance I could see the black cloud, but it was coming closer together as it swirled about the silver buildings. In the unbroken stillness, I saw the frightened little bands of Prytls moving away, hurrying to the world outside.

"Let us not lose sight of them," said Mira. "They will guide us to the place where the Veil can be parted."

SO it was that Mira and I left the city of the immortals, the city that floated on the sea. Truly now it was a Haunted Land, and the end of the people who had fought as a whole world. But I held the magic wand of the little folk, and I remembered the great luminous stone crystal, and I said to Mira, "Simon, and men like Simon, will come here and they will speak to the stone. There are things here for mortals to learn. . . ." And as I spoke, I remembered the brothers I had lost, North the gentle, and Eli, who had been the Shining Man, but I thought also of the mother who waited for me, and of the others who lived, and who would come after me. I held Mira's hand tightly.

"There is a heritage waiting for us," I said, "waiting for the mortals who live, and are happy, and die. It was left for us by our forefathers, and we will claim it."



ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS Barium



HOPING TO PRODUCE GOLD FROM A FLUORESCENT HEAVY SPAR MINERAL HE FOUND IN HIS NEIGHBORHOOD, VINCENZO CASCARIOLO, A COBBLER AND ALCHEMIST OF BOLOGNA, ITALY, TOOK HOME A SAMPLE, HEATED IT AND GOT—NOT GOLD, BUT A GLOWING BARIUM SULPHIDE WHICH HE SOLD AS THE WORLD'S FIRST "PHOSPHORUS." IT WAS QUITE A SCIENTIFIC PLAYTHING IN 1602.

293 YEARS LATER, PROFESSOR RÖNTGEN OF BAVARIA, NOTING THAT BARIUM PLATINOCHROME GLOWED WHEN HE PASSED ELECTRICITY THROUGH A VACUUM TUBE, DISCOVERED THE X-RAY!



A QUARTER CENTURY BEFORE METALLIC BARIUM WAS ISOLATED FROM WITHERITE ORE, A MAN LIVING NEAR THE LEAD MINES OF ANGLEZARK MOOR, ENGLAND FOUND A WITHERITE DEPOSIT, ILLEGITIMATELY MINED IT BY MOONLIGHT, AND STEALTHILY SHIPPED IT TO GERMANY FOR USE IN MAKING PORCELAIN.

ISOLATORS of BARIUM

ALTHOUGH

BERZELIUS, PONTIN AND DAVY ALMOST "SIMULTANEOUSLY" IN 1808, FEW APPEAR TO HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THE FEAT AGAIN UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF OUR CENTURY. BARIUM IS ONE OF THE HARDEST METALS TO ISOLATE.



AMONG

THE MANY BARIUM SALTS IS THE SULPHATE, OPAQUE TO X-RAYS AND SAFE FOR HUMANS SO FED TO PATIENTS ABOUT TO UNDERGO INTESTINAL PHOTOGRAPHY. STRANGELY ENOUGH, THIS SAME BARIUM COMPOUND MAKES A FINE FILLER FOR WALL PAPER AND FOR PRINTING INK! A COMING INSECTICIDE IS BARIUM FLOURITE—DEATH TO TREE INSECTS, YET GENTLE WITH MOST FRUITS AND FOLIAGE.

BARIUM is number 56 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Ba and its atomic weight is 137.37. It occurs chiefly in the form of barytes or heavy spar. The metal is difficult to isolate, and is a silvery white, is a little harder than lead, and is extremely easily oxidized on exposure. It is soluble in



B BARIUM NITRATE RIDES THE SKY LANES

IN THE YELLOW, WHITE AND GREEN SIGNAL FLARES CARRIED FOR EMERGENCIES, THE FLARES ARE SHOT OFF, USUALLY FROM PISTOLS. BARIUM NITRATE, FOR SUCH USE MUST BE 99.5% PURE, FREE FROM TRACES OF SODIUM. RAILROADS AND STEAMSHIPS CARRY BARIUM NITRATE FLARES AND FUSES AS STANDARD EQUIPMENT.

ammonia. Its specific gravity is 3.78. Three oxides of barium are definitely known: the monoxide, the peroxide, and a suboxide. It imparts a green color to a non-luminous gas flame. Barium chloride is used in purifying salt. The sulfate is used in making rubber goods, putty, oilcloth, linoleum, white paper, and as pigment in flat wall paint.

NEXT MONTH: THE ROMANCE OF CADMIUM

Worlds at WAR

BY ED EARL REPP



IT was early night on this world called Earth. So the Korjans had told Saran, who was an Earthman, yet was seeing Earth for the first time in his twenty-five years of life.

"I owe my life and my allegiance to Ryg and his subjects," said Saran. "I have only hatred for the savages of the Earth. For when I was very young, they set my father and me adrift in a space ship, to die of hunger or madness. A Korjan vessel rescued me after my father's death. From that time on I have loved the worlds of Korjan and now I will repay them and show my gratitude."

The space ship had landed here on a rough slope among low hills. Over them came the light of a moon that was as white as Saran's hair was gold, and the earth glinted like the dark bronze of his skin. Tall and steel-muscled, he stood on one side of the thick glass wall that separated him from the Korjans. All

his life had been a preparation for this moment.

"Thank you, Saran." The words smashed at Saran's brain like the clang of metal. Ryg, High Leader of all the frozen planets of the Dark Star was communicating his thoughts. He seemed to Saran to be no more than a diaphanous, almost formless wraith that shimmered, lacy and spidery, beyond the glass partition that bisected the room of the space ship.

"You know you are our chosen one, Saran. Without you we cannot conquer. This earthly pressure of atmosphere would kill us quickly. Yours is the final phase. The energy-stations which we hid here on Earth must not be discovered. They must keep on killing the young at birth."

Saran listened. So many times he had heard the ritual of this talk. Now, as he listened, he stared out at the world called Earth, a strange world of trees and fields, oddly lovely in the moonlight, twisting his

INSTINCTIVELY Saran knew it was wrong to carry out his awful mission against the men of Earth, but he dared not fail—because somewhere, unseen, *The Other* was watching!



Saran pounded the rock against the transparent armor of the Korjan with all his remaining strength, while Helen Wade circled for an opening.

heart with vague memories. It was incredibly different from the Korjan worlds of ice and stone.

"I will find this scientist known as Moss Hartley," said Saran, when Ryg's thoughts ended. "I will stop his dangerous meddling. The plan is an excellent one and will not fail."

For this he had voyaged millions of miles through the void. For vengeance, for gratitude. The white moon rose higher over the hills in the distance.

"I know you will not fail," came the response. "You will be watched constantly by—*The Other*."

Saran started. "The Other?" He frowned. "Who is The Other?"

He felt the amusement among the Korjans beyond the wall. It was a sly, soundless laughter accompanied by the rolling of gruesome eyes and a vibration of tentacles like sea-growths stirred by vagrant currents.

"The Other, Saran," Ryg informed him, "is another Earthling who came to us just before you. He has been on Earth for months, spying for us. Yet he lacks your strength and intelligence, which we need now. But should you ever feel the urge to betray us, he has the means of destroying you promptly."

Anger stained Saran's flat cheeks. "You mean I'm to be spied upon like—a common Earthman?" he gave back, his muscles stiffening.

"Simply because you are an Earthling, Saran," returned the Leader. "We trust you and love you like our own. But to remove temptation from your path, lest you slip into Earthly ways again, The Other will be always near you. Do not try to learn his identity; it will be the one you least suspect."

Saran was still under the grip of resentment and wonder when Ryg addressed him once again, this time with stabbing force.

"What is your supreme duty, Saran?" he demanded.

This key-question immediately plunged the Earthman agent back into his well-learned rôle.

"My duty is to Korja, the Dark Star," he said firmly. "And to the flawless civilization it represents. I owe allegiance to Ryg only until death." He stood straight and tall as he parroted these words. "I will consider my mission finished only when I have succeeded in destroying Hartley and all other interference to our plans. I am ready, Leader."

"Then go!" Ryg commanded, and with a filmy tendril he gestured toward the door. "Do not fail, Saran. It is the command of Ryg and the Supreme Command of Korja. Go now!"

Saran bowed, and turned swiftly to unlock the airtight port. Without another word, he left the space ship and reclosed the door. He had barely moved to a safe distance when, with a hissing wall, the small ship arched into the air. Blazing rocket-flares merged into pinpoints, dissolved in the black sea of night. Then Saran was alone—horribly alone.

HE felt a momentary terror. In all this vast world spreading out around him, he knew no living soul. His very life depended on his cleverness in the next

few days. Yet in many ways his position resembled that on the planets of the dead star.

He had known no one of his kind there. Of his early life, before he was rescued by Ryg, he remembered nothing. But sometimes recollections knifed in his mind. Memories of a tall, kindly man striding through a lofty laboratory. Dreams of himself tagging at the man's heels, asking countless questions. Then of a flight through space—and after that, nothing—

Saran's fright blended naturally into anger. Ryg seemed not to care what risks he took, so long as Korja prospered by them. Ryg's sole interest in him, he felt, was to secure a new world on which the people of the Dark Star could live. For the five planets were becoming too cold to support life.

Earth was the logical home for them, but first it must be altered, the oxygen-laden atmosphere removed, so that the Korjans' lacy bodies would not be crushed like a glass globe at the bottom of the sea. Before that could be done, mankind had to be put out of the way. Until Moss Hartley entered the scene, it appeared that life would disappear from Earth very smoothly in the course of sixty or seventy years. Now, drastic measures were called for.

Yet Saran was loyal. His life had been a preparation for this task, but he owed that life to the Korjans. He had to repay them. Ahead a highway loomed and Saran took it.

New feelings tingled through him. A boundless sense of freedom claimed him at his ability to stride along unhampered by a bulky pressure-suit such as he'd had to wear on the planets Ryg ruled. His steps were long and springy. Here, there was slightly less gravity to bear down upon him.

Saran found himself looking forward eagerly to meeting other men of his kind. And women—he could scarcely remember what the word meant. Yet nature had implanted seeds of possessiveness and longing within him; these feelings puzzled and intrigued him, and now he felt on the eve of solving his inner restlessness.

Saran reached the road and swung along it rapidly. He covered the miles without fatigue. New, fresh blood seemed generating in him like sparkling wine. The warmth of the air, its cleanness, had their way with him. Saran felt as though he were really living!

He had gone about ten miles when a strange, frightening thing approached him from the rear. It slid along the road like half the shell of a shiny black walnut, light spreading a yellow fan on the macadam before it. Saran's heart pounded as he dodged out of the way. With a roar, the machine was upon him, grinding to a halt with a slithering of rubber.

A door popped open. A man's voice called:

"Hop in, buddy. Going as far as Los Angeles?"

SARAN was gripped by confusion. Inside the car was a form and face similar to his own, yet vastly

different. He stared at the man. Then a delighted grin broke on his features, which the pudgy, stout man returned in kind.

"Thanks!" Saran replied. "Just where I'm going."

He sat down on a deep, soft affair of sponge rubber and the machine surged forward once more. Saran, relaxing, studied the driver out of the corner of his eye.

He felt oddly at ease with him—much more so than when he had sat beside Ryg in the Hall of Science. Sometimes the driver laughed at things he said, as if they were meant to be dryly humorous. But Saran was merely experiencing difficulty in understanding. Once the car owner, groping for a cigarette, muttered:

"Take the wheel a minute, will you?"

Saran tried to. The car swerved viciously as he tugged at the wheel, trying literally to tear it loose. The man thought it was an attempt to be funny, but didn't laugh quite so hard this time. The driver turned to him again.

"Where 'bouts, buddy?"

"I don't know, exactly," Saran admitted. "I'm looking for Moss Hartley—"

"Moss Hartley! Well, it won't do no harm to look for him. But you'll darn well go away disappointed if you expect to talk to him. He's been in conference with them four foreign scientists for a week, they tell me, trying to dope out something on the plague. You'd have no more chance of seeing him than if you was selling brushes. Especially in that outfit."

Saran's glance followed the other's to his clothing.

"What—what's wrong with them?"

The driver looked apologetic. "Sorry, buddy," he murmured. "Nothing, except that they haven't been sporting woolen pants and leather shoes for years. I thought you was going to a masquerade."

Saran crimsoned. How many more details like this had they overlooked? he wondered.

"I guess I do look odd," he faltered. "You don't know where I can find him, then?"

"Sure. At his home in Beverly Hills. If you're going there, better get off at the next corner and take the Santa Monica car."

Saran nodded eagerly. He felt as if he were on the verge of being completely exposed as a saboteur. As the car slowed, he pushed the door open, thanked the man, and hurriedly walked off.

For some time he stood in a shadow-filled doorway, pondering his next move. At this moment he thanked his stars for the little store of books that had been found in his father's space ship. From them he'd learned what little he knew of Earthly civilization. But those books couldn't explain how he was to get in to see Moss Hartley.

Well, he could do worse than proceed to his home and try, he decided. But if he failed—nothing to do but wait a month until Ryg returned and gave him further orders.

On the street car, Saran created an amusing situation by pretending—as the passengers thought—not to

know what coin to give the conductor. He had been told a dime was the fare to Beverly Hills, and proceeded to study the coins he had in his pocket until he found one labeled, "One Dime."

The conductor accepted it and disgustedly jerked a thumb at the interior of the car.

"Take your seat—drunk!" he snapped.

Red in the face and still more befuddled, Saran found a seat and hastily slumped down.

CHAPTER II

World of Living Dead

THE Hartley place was a mansion atop a wooded knoll, set well back from the crowded thoroughfares. Saran found no trouble in gaining the front door—but there his worries commenced.

A grave, unrelenting visage showed in the crack of the door following his knock. As the man did not speak, only stared impatiently at the swart visitor, Saran broke the silence.

"I'd like to see Dr. Moss Hartley," he stated.

Something like a laugh issued from the butler's lips.

"So would ten thousand other would-be scientists," he remarked. "Good night to you, sir."

"But you don't understand!" Saran's foot protruded to prevent the door from closing. "I know what is causing the plague. I can stop it. Dr. Hartley will want to see me!"

"All right, boys." The butler opened the door and a pair of brawny figures sauntered out.

They took Saran by each arm and spun him about. One of them snarled:

"All right—crackpot! Try to bust in here like a process server, will you? Take this back to the rest of the screwballs!"

His fist slammed into the back of the visitor's head. At the same instant, the second guard aimed a kick at his back. But in the instant before the blow landed, Saran himself came about with a guttural curse.

Savagely he fastened long fingers about each throat. With a grunt, he brought the men's heads together. One of them sagged to the lawn as his knees buckled. The other dodged aside, to rush back with swinging fists.

Saran appeared not to move, but his body wove gracefully from the path of the flying fists. The bullet-headed man came up against him in surprise. Then Saran gently raised his fist up beneath the guard's chin. Teeth clattered like castanets; the man writhed down.

When Saran started for the door again, it slammed in his face and a lock clicked. Saran could only stare. After a moment, he moved away, deeply troubled. He did not doubt that he could break the portal down, but that would only earn him more trouble. Somehow, he must get inside, in such a way that Moss Hartley would listen to him. And, listening to him, would doom the world—

A vibrant, silvery voice brought him spinning about. Within a few feet of him was the loveliest creature Saran had ever seen. It was a girl. A strange sight, indeed, to his eyes, but one that made his pulses quicken.

Brown, wavy hair framed a pale oval of a face. Laughing red lips mocked the baffled man. A full-curving body was revealed by tight-fitting gold-cloth blouse and skirt.

"Congratulations!" she was saying. "Out of forty-odd hare-brained scientists those two plainclothes men have tackled, you're the first one to lick them. Not that I mean you're a hare-brained scientist—forgive the implication."

"I—I'm sorry about what I had to do. But they attacked me, you see." Saran regarded the still forms ruefully.

"Sure," the girl said. Then: "Well, what's your plan to save the world?"

Saran read deep bitterness in her words. But he shook his head.

"I came here to see Moss Hartley. What I've got to say is for him alone."

The delicately arched eyebrows raised a trifle.

"I'm Helen Wade, Dr. Hartley's secretary," the answer came quietly. "Perhaps—since you do seem more sensible than the others—I could get you a very brief audience with him."

"If you could!" Impulsively, Saran took her forearm in his powerful grip. She winced, then laughed.

"If it means that much to you—come!" she invited, and led the way around the corner of the house to the rear.

HER private key let them in a back entrance. They passed through several dark, deserted laboratories. Ascending a flight of stairs, Saran asked cautiously:

"These other men with him—who are they?"

"Don't you read the papers?" the answer mocked him. "They are the four leading scientists of the world. Ferguson, of England; Perrin, of France; Rutters, of Germany; and Massetti, of Italy. Any one of them has a reputation greater than that of Doctor Hartley. But his discovery has aroused attention all over this god-forsaken world of ours. They were sent here to study his methods by their respective governments."

Then they were stopping before an unobtrusive-looking door.

"Brace yourself, Mister!" the girl smiled. "You're either coming out of here a hero or a failure."

Her polite rap brought a gruff voice through the panel.

"Who is it?"

"Miss Wade, Doctor. I have an important visitor to see you. May we come in?"

Footfalls thumping across a carpet. The door pulled open. For a moment light blinded Saran, so that all he could make out was swirling wreaths of tobacco

smoke and dim shapes around a table. His vision clearing, he let his glance go over the tall, rawboned figure at the door. The man's hair was disheveled, his coat off, a reeking pipe between his teeth.

"Important, eh?" the doctor snapped. "Who the devil is he?"

Saran put in hurriedly: "John Saran, Doctor. I have a—a plan you might—"

"My God, Miss Wade!" Hartley yanked the pipe from his teeth. "You interrupt us to bring in another would-be savior? This is going to cost you your job!"

"But, Doctor Hartley! He's explained his idea to me. I think it will hold water," Miss Wade lied beautifully, smiling engagingly as she spoke. "Won't you give him five minutes?"

"Oh—come on in!" Hartley growled disgustedly. Slamming the door after the pair had entered, he pointed a crooked forefinger at the five men gathered about a paper-littered table.

"Ferguson, Perrin, Massetti, Rutters," he tolled off.

"More brains than you've ever seen around one table in your life. And my assistant, Smedley, not so backward himself. Speak slowly and as clearly as you can. Some of the gentlemen don't understand our language very well."

Saran was studying the men closely. Oddly, in this moment he was recalling Ryg's words regarding The Other:

"It will be the one you suspect least!" And it came to Saran that here among the men in the room was the Korjan spy. His eyes swept over them.

Rutters, the German, was solid, straight-backed, bald, with a wide mouth and blue eyes under blond brows. Those eyes went through the young man like a bullet.

Perrin, of France, a tall man, lolled in his chair and smiled at Saran as if to put him at his ease. There was an ashtray heaped with smouldering cigarettes at his elbow.

Ferguson was blond and gaunt and stern. His nose, long and looming, seemed to bisect his overlong face. Massetti, the Italian scientist, was his counterpart. Short, fat, and possessed of snapping black eyes, oily hair in a mass of unruly curls, and an impersonal smile.

Saran's gaze finally came to rest on Smedley, the assistant. Instant dislike swept him. The man had pale eyes like chips of ice, and flaccid, unhealthy skin stretched over his bony face. That skin was the one thing that allayed Saran's suspicion. It would be improbable that any man could make the long voyage through space without becoming as deeply burned by intense solar rays as he himself. At last Saran began to speak—to speak the things Ryg had schooled him in so long.

"Gentlemen, there is a reason for what has overtaken Earth!" The force of his statement arrested their bored inattention at once. "Nature is tired of man. She has tired of him as she tired of the dinosaur, after putting three hundred million years of careful development on that misfitted beast. Even as she

tired of the dinosaur's successor after another twenty million years.

"Today nature is tired of man. He has abused every tool, every weapon she has given him. Physically, he is a mechanical misfit. And, gentlemen, she has determined to kill him off and groom some other animal to take his place!"

A STIR of interest among the scientists.

"You speak of Nature as if she were an all-powerful ruler," Smedley protested.

"Isn't she?" Saran replied. "The cleverest ruler reigns with the least ostentation. Nature obliterated the dinosaur gradually. She is annihilating us less gradually. We ourselves are doing her work by proxy."

Saran's hands went out to grip the back of a chair, and he leaned forward to fix the men with his sharp glance.

"The Third World War has not been over six months. New weapons entered that conflict—new explosives. One of those explosives filled the upper atmosphere with a gas, which intensified a certain ray to the point where it has the power to kill the weaker forms of life—such as newborn infants."

Rutters snorted. "Clearly a half-developed hypothesis," he scoffed. "Dr. Hartley has proved to our satisfaction that a germ is causing the plague. In a special ward at General Hospital this was made certain only yesterday."

A bleak smile curved Saran's lips. "May I ask how?"

Hartley savagely chewed the stem of his pipe.

"I wouldn't say the matter was proved as yet, *Herr* Rutters," he growled. "The point is this, Mr. Saran. I filled a chamber with a heavy gas, and the delivery in one of the hospital's maternity cases was made within it. The child is still living, twenty-two hours later."

He smiled quizzically at Saran. "You see why we scoff at your 'ray' assumption, *Monsieur*. We have definite proof otherwise."

"Proof! One case! I can explain your apparent success, Dr. Hartley. The heaviness of the gas within that chamber partially protected the newborn child. It remains to be seen how long the infant lives. And there is this—have you not noticed an increase in old-age mortality?"

"Why—" Ferguson, the Englishman frowned. "A slight one, yes."

"There you are! These rays have the power to kill all of us, given time! But the weak are taken first. Eventually, we will all succumb. Unless my plan is put into practice immediately, Earth is under sentence of death!"

Hartley asked quietly, "Just what do you propose?"

"Enormous glass shields to cover every large city in the world. Here all must live until the atmospheric condition is remedied—if ever. Shields that we must never venture outside of—a glass cover for every metropolis!"

"Ridiculous!" snorted Rutters. "The thing is im-

possible. The coefficient of expansion of the best glass would make such a thing impossible. The domes wouldn't last a week. They'd shatter on warm days, fall to pieces on cold ones."

Saran shook his head at the man's ignorance.

"Brush up on your physics, *Herr* Rutters," he advised sarcastically. "The Sjorn Theorem postulates that if magnetic rays are made to flow transversely to the grain of the glass, expansion and contraction are eliminated."

In the brittle silence that followed, Saran sucked his breath in noiselessly. The scientists exchanged glances in wonder, then focused their gaze on Saran. The girl stared at him curiously. The moments fled and presently, Hartley cleared his throat to speak.

"The Sjorn Theorem, Saran? I, for one, have never heard of it! Nor of such a thing as expansionless glass! Where did you study physics?"

CHAPTER III

Domes of Death

PANIC brought the blood to Saran's face in a swift flood. He hadn't dreamed Earthly science could be so backward. But as he groped for words, something took place that temporarily saved him. The door opened and a girl entered.

She compared favorably with Helen Wade for breath-taking beauty. But hers was the quiet kind, where Hartley's secretary possessed the flamboyance of rich red lips and black hair. The new girl was blond, with steady, grave eyes and a self-confidence that even the startled Saran was able to admire. She went to Moss Hartley hurriedly.

"The hospital, Dad!" she breathed. "Something's happened. They want you right away!"

A hardness settled upon Hartley's seamed features.

"They—they didn't say what it is, Enid?"

"Nothing, except that there's been a change. I told the chauffeurs to have the cars ready."

Hartley dived for coat and hat. The others swarmed for the door with black desperation written in their eyes. Hartley paused on the threshold, glanced back.

"Drive this young fellow over, will you, Enid?" he clipped. "I think he's crazy, but he interests me. And, Miss Wade—see that no more of these so-called scientists get in, will you?"

Saran, as he went out, saw penitence in her averted eyes, mischief in the quirk of her lips.

A private elevator lifted the group to the seventy-fifth floor of the monstrous General Hospital. An interne led the way down the hall, to turn into a small room where a nurse waited. Saran's glance went to the closed door beyond her, sealed with black tape. She began to strip off the tape as they entered.

Very soon they were filing silently into a darkened room filled with dense, sour-smelling gas. A light came on, glowing like a street lamp in the fog. The nurse hurried to a glass-shielded incubator. Tears glistened

in her eyes when she turned to Hartley. But no words came from her trembling lips.

Saran was standing by Enid Hartley when she looked into the incubator. He could feel a shudder rack her body. With a muffled sob she gripped her father's arms and buried her face against his coat, slim shoulders trembling.

Saran looked down. On a bed of soft blankets he made out the tiny red form of a child. A child whose head had swelled to twice the size of its body, whose legs were long, spaghetti-thin tendrils and whose arms had shriveled up. The face was like a shapeless mass of pink dough. Life was in the infant—but a ghastly sort of life, born of chaos.

Saran felt his heart twist within him. He tried to stem the waves of pity that swept over him, and failed dismally.

The scientists were silent. This, then, had been their bid for salvation for Earth—this helpless little imbecile to which they had fastened their hope. Hartley's voice was a husky whisper.

"Remove the gas, nurse. This—this is horrible."

As light and air began to pour through the open window, he turned to Saran.

"You were right," he muttered. "No germ could have penetrated that antiseptic gas. Will you come back with us? I believe we are ready to listen, now. God knows you cannot fail more bitterly than I have!"

IT was a silent pair who returned in Enid Hartley's little coupé. The dejected girl drove listlessly, as if some vital spark had died within her. Grimly Saran reminded himself that he had no part in this tragic affair. Earth had brought disaster upon itself by its own intolerance. Earthlings had murdered his father for having revolutionary ideas. Such a race did not deserve to exist!

But he gained only a measure of peace. Ryg had schooled him in the theory that only the strongest intellectually deserve to live. Saran's brain could see the logic in that; his heart could not.

Finally the girl came out of her dark reverie.

"So you, too, have a theory," she remarked. "Do you think it will work any better than dad's?"

Saran was quick to accept the challenge in her question.

"I am sure of it," he replied. "In my laboratory I have caused bacteria to propagate normally, something that has not taken place during all these months."

The girl's eyes were dark and brooding. "It's ghastly," she murmured. "All these horrible little changes that serve to remind us constantly that life has ceased to exist—new life, I mean. Even bacilli are dying off. Dentists report that tooth decay has completely ceased. Undertakers say that embalming is unnecessary now."

"Corpses remain just as perfect as though still alive. The world will be overflowing with dead in a few years. Animals, birds, rodents—they will lie right where they fall, for all time, or until squads of gravediggers bury

them. Death all around us, and not a new life brought forth this year!"

Quickly the girl stifled the hysterical crescendo of her words.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Forgive me for letting loose. If I don't seem any too confident in this theory of yours, it's because I've seen dozens, scores of plans tried, all of them to fail."

Saran shrugged. "I know. But you'll pardon me, too, if I don't seem worried by it all. You see, I happen to have faith that I can stop this plague!"

But he would tell her no more than that. His advice was to wait until they returned to the laboratory, and see with her own eyes.

An hour later they were all gathered in Hartley's private laboratory, waiting while Saran gathered a few things together that he would need in his proof to the scientists. They evinced a little more respect when he addressed them for the second time.

"I mentioned the Sjern Theorem and expansionless glass," he reminded casually. "Unfortunately, I am not at liberty to tell you all there is to know about these matters. The man I studied under is one of the greatest scientists who ever lived—and yet you would not know his name if I told you. But as to that glass, gentlemen. Watch!"

Defly he strung wires in an intricate maze involving condensers, tubes, a rheostat. They were connected to a long bar paralleling a strip of glass about two feet in length, suspended over several Bunsen burners. An electric measuring device would record the slightest expansion of the glass plate. Saran switched on the juice to the magnetic set-up, lighted the burners.

In a few seconds, the glass was glowing pink. Smedley watched dubiously. Hartley was intent, the others torn between a desire to scoff and the fear of making fools of themselves if they did.

And the glass remained unchanged! Not a millimeter did it expand!

The quartz was heated almost to the melting point, but the electrical recorder was silent. Saran suddenly began to chuckle.

"Prognosis positive," he smiled. "I continue to demonstration Number Two. Mr. Smedley, can you find me a culture of good, lively bacteria? *Proteus vulgaris* will do."

Saran was conscious of the silence within the laboratory. Deliberately, he took his time about arranging a watch-glass of bacteria beneath a microscope. The bacilli were dormant until he added liquid. Hartley had to keep them in a semi-dry condition, or through self-division they would soon have annihilated themselves. When Saran pressed a button, a small screen projected an image of the swarming culture for all to see.

Immediately, the rod-shaped bacteria commenced to multiply through self-division—gradually lengthening, then splitting in the middle. But where, under ordinary conditions, the population would thus have been

increased, both halves of the new, struggling pair died instantly. They were too weak to withstand the barrage of deadly energy-waves Ryg's stations created.

THE smiling, tanned young scientist had taken a circle of blue glass from his pocket. Casually he laid it atop the watch-glass, so that the bacteria were shielded.

Silence; the kind of dread quiet when lives are at stake. Then through the room coursed a current of shock. Rutters and Massetti slowly got to their feet, their faces white. Hartley's pipe hit the floor with a loud crack.

Helen Wade's voice sbared the hush. "Doctor—they're living!"

There was a rush for the microscope to verify what the screen showed. One by one the scientists pressed forward to eye the living, propagating bacilli. All lifted strained, white visages to Saran. At last he spoke.

"Convinced, gentlemen?"

Something like worship was in Enid Hartley's face. Tears stood in her eyes.

"Would it do that for children?" she whispered.

"Would it help the millions of future mothers to keep their babies?"

"I don't know why not," Saran replied confidently.

"Am I to have the chance to prove it, Dr. Hartley?"

Hartley shoved his hands deep in his pockets.

"How soon can you turn out enough of that glass to insulate an entire maternity ward?" he grunted.

"As fast as you can supply me with ordinary window glass and a few special chemicals. The bluish color is sprayed on. We can have the work done by tomorrow night, if we hurry."

"Then what are we standing here for?" roared the elderly scientist, abruptly. "Smedley, have the glass here in an hour. Ferguson, Rutters—and the rest of you—get things ready for high-speed production. What materials will you need, Saran?"

Saran told them. Hartley barked orders, sent the dignified men of science scurrying out like common errand boys. At last only three of them remained, Hartley and his daughter and Saran.

"You'll stay with us, of course," Hartley decided curtly. "Enid will find you a room. If you need rest, you'd better get it now. We'll be working all night and all day."

Saran murmured: "Thank you, Doctor. I could do with a little sleep."

He was on the point of following the girl from the room when the physicist called him back. Hartley was studying him intently.

"You said your name was Saran," he mused. "It wouldn't have been Saunders once, would it?"

Apprehension laid a cold stream along the younger man's spine. He shook his head, searched Hartley's face. For "Saunders" was the name written in many of the books he had read that were taken from the fatal space ship in which he and his father, years be-

fore, had been condemned to death.

"I just wondered," Hartley shrugged. "I had a very dear friend once by the name of Lawrence Saunders. Your resemblance to him is remarkable. But he's been dead these twenty years, poor chap; he and his wife and boy. God knows what became of them, out there in space—"

Saran's fists were balled up hard and his lips were dry.

"Out—in space?" he said huskily. Inside him a monotonous voice kept droning that his ruse was already detected, his usefulness to Ryg at an end.

"A brilliant man, Saunders," the other mused. "Yes, and a great-hearted one. He was on his way to Jupiter with his family, to accept a post among the natives there and try to wipe out the dreaded *lakma* epidemic. The last thing he radioed back to us was of an unknown ship scuttling them. He spoke of strange beings like jellyfish. Then his radio went dead."

Shrugging, Hartley turned away. "Ah, well, it was just an idea. Get your sleep, Saran."

But Saran did not get his sleep that night.

Turmoil tore at his brain. Hartley was lying! But why? To confuse him? But who should want to do that—for who knew his purpose on Earth? Only—The Other. And if The Other had turned traitor—warned Hartley. . . . Did Hartley then hope to mollify Saran's hate with lies? But why should Hartley listen to him, knowing who he was? There was no answer, and it tortured him.

IT occurred to him that his fears were ridiculous.

Hartley could have basis for no such suspicions.

But he resolved to bend every effort toward caution. Once let those glass domes be raised over Earth's cities, as he planned, and his work was done. For, given time, the glass would do more than appeared on the surface. It would save mankind from one fate, a fate that Hartley's work was in danger of eventually averting, but it would bring on just as certain a doom.

Exposure to the blue light for a few months would render every man and woman on Earth sterile. And no scientist's skill could restore the miracle of reproduction, once it was lost.

CHAPTER IV

The Second Visit

THE spring-steel tension of those next few days was never forgotten by any who lived through it. Four squirming, red-faced little beings came into the world in General Hospital's special ward—and lived. More babies were born under Saran's blue glass and more shields were raised. *Not a child was lost in two weeks!*

A month, and the news flared across the world. An American scientist had achieved the miracle. Life had resumed in America! How was it done? How could other cities duplicate the feat?

Saran sent the answer back with Ferguson, Perrin

and Massetti. They, and the men they trained in the work, carried the legend of his wizardry far and wide. Special maternity wards went up overnight. Immense glass domes lifted from the Earth within a matter of months. Tunnels of glass linked the metropolises. Life took on a surrealistic aspect.

A terror was born in mankind of the naked rays of the sun. Farmers tilled their fields under strange glass umbrellas. Where plant life had failed to withstand the deadly rays, they were transferred to immense greenhouses, to grow in immunity. Telephone linemen and others who must labor in the open country wore spun-glass armor. Within the mighty hemispheres that arched above the cities, an eerie blue twilight dwelt. But men and women could stand the ghastly look of each other in knowing death had been routed.

Dentists rubbed their hands in glee. Every day saw more decayed teeth coming their way. Starving physicians admitted relief as bacterial diseases again broke out in normal amounts.

But Saran, who knew that another two months would see them all doomed, was far from glad. Worst of all, he had fallen in love with Enid Hartley. He who had plotted the destruction of her kind, found himself longing to be her mate.

Strange, fierce yearnings made life a hell for him. Constantly he had to remind himself of the superiority of the Korjans to these people whose joys and sorrows he now found himself sharing. And there was another who observed his vacillation.

One night, after a drive with Enid, he returned to his room to find a neat, white card lying on the pillow. Typed on it was a cryptic command:

"Be in the field tomorrow at midnight. Ryg is displeased."

Something froze inside him. In his furtive, semi-happiness with Enid, he had forgotten that the eyes of The Other were on him constantly. Staring at the card, suspicions crawled like ants through his brain.

Who was the other spy? Rutters, who had not returned to his own country, on the excuse of wanting to study Saran's methods further? Smedley, the sardonic one? With cold abruptness, Saran remembered the warning: "—the one you suspect least!"

The man Saran suspected least was Moss Hartley.

MIDNIGHT the following night found him driving into the Tehachapi Hills, far beyond the end of the glass tunnel. He parked in the brush and walked slowly up the hill to the little hollow where Ryg had landed before. Then he saw it, silvery-white in the moonlight, like a thimble set on its base among screening bushes.

The door was open when he reached it. Saran shook off chains of aversion and strode inside.

Instantly, light flooded the space ship. Beyond the partition, he made out the spongy presence of the Korjans. Ryg's voice burned itself into his brain.

"You have failed us! What of your oath, Saran?"

Disgust piled upon him. Nothing had ever nauseat-

ed him as did the gelatinous appearance of the man he had once admired. Those ghastly green orbs, floating in mid-air— His gaze fell before the hot accusation in their translucent depths.

"I have not failed, Ryg," he made protest. "Within another month Earth will be a planet of the sterile. Fifty or seventy-five years, and you can take possession."

"Bah! I told you I have done with wasting time. Earthmen are resourceful. In that time, they might find a new means of reproduction. Even as the man Hartley was trembling on the verge of discovering our energy stations."

The string of vituperation broke, resumed more quietly.

"I saw strange domes of glass as we landed tonight. Is that part of your work?"

"I had them erected to stop one plague and cause a worse one. The Earth people are ignorant of their danger. Thus they are blissfully rushing toward disaster."

"Rushing!" Ryg sneered. "Fifty years! I will soon remedy that. You employed the Sjorn Theorem in these domes of yours?"

Saran nodded, wondering what was back of the question.

Then for a while only jumbled thought-sequences entered the young Earthling's mind, as Ryg consulted with his ministers. At last:

"You will do as follows," Ryg commanded. "Find the magnetic plane of the human brain. Alter the frequency of the Sjorn impulsors to correspond to this plane. Then have the power output doubled, on some pretext, in every dome you have erected."

Saran's lips curled in contempt. "I thought you said the men of Earth were the barbarians. What do you call yourself, proposing such a plan? It would break down the brain cells, make a race of idiots out of them! It would mean reversion to savagery—"

"Exactly! Mankind would butcher one another, the strong would prey upon the weak. They would gut their civilization within a year. And their very sterility would take care of the rest."

Saran's head went back a little. "I will not do it! Perhaps I have enough of my weak and savage ancestors in me that your greed and ruthlessness disgust me. And by the way—you have always taught me that my father and I were exiled as martyrs. Hartley says Lawrence Saunders left Earth voluntarily!"

"Hartley!" Ryg sneered. "You put this lying moron's word before Ryg's? I have told you the truth, Saran. What reason had I to lie?"

The Earthman frowned. What Ryg said was logical enough. Ryg had no reason to bring him up as his own son, to teach him the intellectual treasures of Korja.

Ryg's eyes went crafty. He struck at the psychological moment.

"I will forgive you your faithlessness, Saran, if you follow my commands from now on. Do not try to

betray me again. The Other is always in touch with me. Nor will I be far away at any time. Tomorrow night I will expect your work to be finished, and you will rejoin us here."

Saran seemed to feel the fingers of a giant hand closing about him.

"You are the Leader," he murmured. "I—I will not fail you."

Exultation stirred the Korjans behind the glass. Ryg said, as he had said on another night long since:

"What is your supreme duty, Saran?"

And Saran made the answer that strangely galled him now.

"My duty is to Korja. I owe allegiance to Ryg, unto death."

But later that night, as he tossed on his bed, he asked himself if any oath of allegiance could stand the test of such unreasoning cruelty.

IN the laboratory next morning Saran was strangely sullen. Work had gone on for weeks on the ever present problem—the cause of the fatal radiations. As he watched Smedley, Rutters and Hartley laboring over abstruse formulas near the window, he realized how close they were coming to the truth. Slowly he walked toward them.

Hartley glanced up, as the younger man's shadow patterned the table. His brows drew into a querulous V-shape.

"We've got to make a change in the domes," Saran announced curtly.

"But why?" Rutters shrugged. "Aren't they working satisfactorily?"

"So far. But winter is coming, and I don't know how they'll stand the weight of snow in the colder countries. We've got to vary the impulsor frequency and double the output. That should give enough heat to melt the snow as fast as it falls."

Hartley's eyes roved over his face intently. He didn't appear quite satisfied with the explanation.

But: "As you say, my boy," he gave in. "I'll give the order and have it sent everywhere, all over the world. Have you decided on the procedure?"

"Give me an hour," Saran growled. Jamming his hands in his pockets, he left the room.

He had not been at work more than twenty minutes when Enid came quietly into the small laboratory. Though she spoke, Saran did not look up; only answered gruffly and continued his work. For a while he was conscious of her moving about, straightening things up, occupying herself in a hundred inconsequential actions that betrayed her inner turbulence.

Finally she was stopping by his chair and turning his face up to hers with a fingertip under his chin.

"There's something wrong," she said. "What is it, Saran?"

"Nothing! Why should something be wrong, merely because I have to work?"

"It's more than that. You're troubled."

He pushed her hand away, failed to meet her gaze.

Then she was saying sadly,

"There are times when you seem strange, Saran. We know so little of you, really. Once you said you aren't John Saunders. But—tell me the truth: are you Lawrence Saunders' son, or not?"

Saran went rigid. Suspicion again! His fingers locked on the pencil in his hand so hard that the wood cracked. In the next instant, Helen Wade entered with a mass of data.

"Telephone, Miss Hartley," she announced cheerfully.

Enid bit her lip. "Thanks," she murmured. She went out with the question still unanswered.

Before long she was back. "It's strange," she said. "The party was gone when I got there. Who was it, Miss Wade?"

"I couldn't say," Helen told her. "It was a man's voice."

Saran knew a vagrant gratitude for her interruption. Enid didn't pursue her inquisition, with the secretary listening.

It was shortly after Enid had departed that Saran got the brilliant idea. He came straight up on the edge of his chair.

"Miss Wade!" he jerked. "Do they keep old newspapers on file in the library?"

"Why, certainly," the girl told him. "Is there something I can look up for you?"

"No, it—I'll take care of it myself."

He drove recklessly from the Beverly Hills mansion into the metropolis, conscious that the answer to all his problems lay in a twenty-year-old newspaper in the library's files. In it he could find the truth regarding Lawrence Saunders' death.

Had he actually been exiled by Earthmen? Or—*had Ryg scuttled the space ship and kidnaped the scientist's boy?*

IN an ancient, yellowed copy of the *Post*, he found the story. The bold-faced words served to set his blood on fire:

SAUNDERS FAMILY MURDERED OFF PLANET JUPITER AFTER ATTACK BY SPACE PIRATES

Lawrence Saunders, brilliant scientist, died yesterday, as heave in death as he had been in life.

While weird pirates from the void, who needed no space armor to withstand the rigors of the pressureless vacuum surrounding the ships, worked with drills to break into the *Valiant II*, Saunders radioed terse accounts of the efforts to save himself and his wife and boy. He described the attackers as octopuslike beings, as transparent as molten glass.

His loss to the world is one that will not soon be forgotten.

The paper fell from Saran's listless fingers. Suddenly there were tears in his eyes. Then, with terrible fear clutching at his heart, he darted from the building.

He found Hartley and the others gathered in the main laboratory waiting for his arrival.

Wild-eyed, panting, he clutched Hartley by the shoulder.

"Have you put in that call yet?" he demanded.

Hartley indicated the telephone with its receiver off the hook.

"Ferguson and the others are waiting."

Saran picked up the instrument, cut the connection by replacing the receiver in the prongs. At the scientists' astonished exclamations, he squared off before them.

"Listen—all of you," he snapped. "This is going to be more than a confession. It's a command as well. I've led you into a trap that was meant to blot all life from the face of the Earth. Now I'm ready to tell you how to avoid that trap!"

Tension leaped through the room. Saran's dark eyes glittered. He was watching for the one man or woman—for even Enid and Helen weren't above his suspicions—whose expression did not betray surprise. And he found that only Moss Hartley failed to look shocked.

He told his story with such force that it seemed no one breathed during the recital. He told it with so much sincerity that there was no cry of "Traitor!" from a single throat. Only amazement—and eagerness to hear him out.

Hartley was the first to stir. He got to his feet and extended an acid-stained hand.

"Thank God for men like you!" he breathed. "You had the intelligence to question your orders and the courage to act. But don't think I haven't known who you were, John Saunders. I was only biding my time, waiting for you to tell us all.

"You slipped too often. You never explained the 'Sjorn Theorem' to my satisfaction. Once you referred to a 'dargol'; later, I learned you meant 'day'. Now that you have helped get us into this predicament, how are you going to get us out?"

"There is only one way to do that," Saran said incisively. "It will mean the utmost care at every step. One of us here may be The Other I mentioned. If so, Ryg will know of our plans before we are well started. He expects me tonight. I can lie to him and make him think his orders have been followed. That will give us two or three days in which to work."

"What can be done? Evacuate the glass globes?" Rutters queried.

"Every one of them must be destroyed," Saran nodded. "We will insulate all hospitals with the glass, but other than that, it will be far less harmful to remain in the direct path of the rays. We must enlist thousands of aviators and equip them with electroscopes, which will detect the energy stations fifty miles away. Every one that is found must be bombed. Since there are hundreds spread over the Earth, it may take weeks."

"What do we do now?" Smedley growled. "Just sit here?"

"Nothing, until I've talked with Ryg. He may have other cards up his sleeve; I don't know. But I do know this: unless the six of us remain here, all together, until time for me to visit Ryg again, the Korjans will know what has happened. We're going to

sit tight for two hours, and wonder which of you is the traitor!"

THE strain of waiting rasped brutally at the nerves of them all, as the minutes tolled off. Dusk wore on, and Hartley had dinner brought in. But few touched their food; they were too occupied with watching each other like hawks.

With darkness spreading across the sky, Saran stood up.

"Eight o'clock," he grunted. "I'll just have time to make it. As a special precaution, suppose no one leaves the room before midnight. Good night!"

His hand palming the knob, he froze. Someone was speaking softly.

"Not so fast, my friend. We are all going to meet Ryg tonight. Put your hands up!"

He whirled around, to see Helen Wade standing at the head of the table with a gun in her small fist. A tight little smile had frozen her lips.

Enid whispered: "You! We—we should have realized. All of the others we've known for years."

The brunette's eyes looked hard as steel. She let the gun slant down at the other girl.

"Of course you should have known. But that is where Earthly stupidity held you back. Saran, I could kill you right now and enjoy it. But Ryg's plans must not be crossed. I was told to let you live, whatever happened. He has ways of using the brains of even traitors like you. And these others—he may desire them, too."

Enid came to her feet, eyes blazing. "How you, a woman, can be a party to such brutality is incredible! Can you still believe the lies this Ryg has fed you on, when you see the lengths to which he will go to gain his ends?"

"Lies!" sneered the girl. "There are more liars right in this room than on all the planets of the Dark Star. Like Saran himself, I was rescued from death by the Korjans. And I intend to repay that debt. Open the door, Saran."

Saran advanced a step toward her.

"Think, Helen!" he said sharply. "Ryg told me he was my benefactor, and I have proof he actually murdered my parents. Why he saved me is obvious: he was planning for this invasion even then, needed go-betweens like you and me to do work the Korjans couldn't accomplish. Are you going to let yourself—"

Fanatical hatred was in the brunette's pale features. The hammer of the little revolver inched back.

"Open that door and walk out in single file," she breathed. "We are leaving the back way. Make a single false motion, and I'll kill every one of you! I have enough bullets in here to accommodate you all. And then where will your precious Earth be?"

It was that thought, rather than the menace of cold steel, that made Saran obey her orders. Within ten seconds, the group was filing somberly out the back door. Helen Wade took no chances. She motioned Hartley, Enid and Saran into the front seat of Saran's

car, forced Smedley and Rutters to lie down on the floor of the back seat. Then she perched on the rear cushions with the gun ever vigilant.

"Now—drive!" she commanded.

Saran's nerves tingled like live wires all the way to the rendezvous. Bitterly he realized he had plunged them all into this predicament. Yet no opportunity developed to disarm their fanatical captor.

There was something different about the space ship this time, when they clambered toward it up the rough terrain. Saran's heart leaped when he realized what it was.

Ryg and the others were outside, in bulky space suits! Saran tried to keep his emotions out of his face. For this was their first break—and a slim chance it was.

With queer, octopuslike waddling motions, the four Korjans scuttled toward them. Ryg's thoughts lashed across the intervening distance.

"Again you have failed me, Saran. For the last time! You did well to bring him, Urna. Who are the others?"

Helen Wade said bitterly: "This is the man Hartley, and his cohorts. They are intelligent but misguided. I thought, perhaps—"

"My brain museum?" Ryg trembled all over with eagerness. "Welcome additions! When I have subjugated their minds, they will be useful to us."

HARTLEY recoiled as the master of Korja approached him.

"You damned, gelatinous monster!" the physicist spat. "Do you think you're god of the universe, to plan such a thing?" He aimed a kick at the wrathful Leader.

Two of the other three rushed at him with waving tentacles—and that was the chance Saran had prayed for.

In a flat, swift dive, he sprang squarely into Ryg's middle. Turmoil reigned. Helen Wade screamed at him, but held her fire for fear of striking the Leader.

Then for a moment Saran and Ryg were tumbling down the slope in a mass of writhing tentacles and kicking legs. Ryg's power was that of a boa constrictor. But his bulky space suit hampered him, and it gave Saran a chance to get behind him and force him to the ground.

His superior weight bore the smaller creature down. Seizing a rock, he began to batter at the man's helmet. The thick, resilient glass bent a little. Ryg screamed curses, struggled like a bundle of lashing snakes.

"Kill him, Urna!" he shrieked. "My helmet is breaking!"

The girl began edging around them, striving for a shot at Saran. But he was quick and vigilant enough to keep Ryg between them constantly. It came powerfully to him that here in this spot, the fate of Earth was being decided. That was spur enough to drive him to the utmost of his strength.

Again and again the rock crashed against Ryg's

armor. The other Korjans were all occupied with the remaining Earthmen. Rutters had found himself a rock and begun to hammer at the face of one of the Korjan ministers. Enid shrank back against the ship.

Then Saran heard the sound that lighted hope within him. A thin, high hiss. The sound of air leaking into the monster's helmet!

Ryg screamed horribly. "Kill him! Get him off me! I've got to get in the ship. My armor—"

Helen discarded caution. Her gun spoke twice. Saran felt Death pluck at his shoulder. But in the next moment a deafening whistle burst from Ryg's helmet. Before the Earthman's horrified eyes, the Leader's body seemed to dissolve into a mass of tiny green globules. His eyes shrank in size, then burst. And suddenly his brain ceased to shriek imprecations and pleas for mercy.

Hartley, too, had acted in that instant. Helen Wade saw him too late. Hartley's lanky body crashed into hers. While she was reeling back from the impact, he tore the gun from her fingers. Quickly he pivoted, leveled the revolver at one of the monsters.

The thunder of his shot was echoed by a shrill whistle from another Korjan's space suit. Hartley swung the pistol on the creature struggling with Rutters. With its face-plate shot away, the Korjan dissolved into harmless protoplasm.

There was only one of the invaders left, and Moss Hartley coldly blasted it into eternity. But even as the echo of the shot ceased to roll back from the hills, a new sound reached their ears. The clang of a door closing.

With one impulse, the four men sprang forward. Helen Wade had gained the rocket ship and locked herself in. Now, with a broken sputtering, the jets came to life.

Saran shouted: "Back! The blast will burn us alive. Let her go!"

Barely in time, they reached a little grove of trees and watched the ship flame into the dark sky. Enid's hand groped for Saran's clenched fist. His fingers locked on hers with sudden buoyancy.

"We've won!" he breathed. "Beaten the greedy little monsters at their own game."

"But Helen—" Hartley was voicing the question in all their minds. "Will she be back with other Korjans?"

"If she is, we'll be ready for them next time. She's doomed herself to the hell of living among the Korjans in their dying universe."

"Does that sound so terrible to you now, Saran?" Enid was smiling up at him.

HE shook his head. "This is where I belong, among my own people."

His face turned toward the city. "But there is not time to talk of these things now. I have a debt to Earth that must be paid. After the last energy dome is destroyed, there will be time for—other things."

Enid smiled happily, knowing what was in his heart.

Finding the secret of will power made Lefty Lopez a mighty fine pitcher—until it got out of control!

"C'mere an' get socked!" howled Kelly, pursuing the errant baseball around first base. "Well, I lay a bet on your hide!"



"**A**ND that's final!" shouted Joey Ricks, manager of the Hawkinsville Hawks, pounding the desk. "Either yer pitchin' and battin' improve, and fast and plenty, or yer through!"

The long, lean frame of Lefty Lopez wriggled anxiously in the chair on which he sprawled. "But boss," he protested, "I'm doin' my best."

"It ain't good enough!" barked Ricks. "It ain't even good enough fer a high school team!"

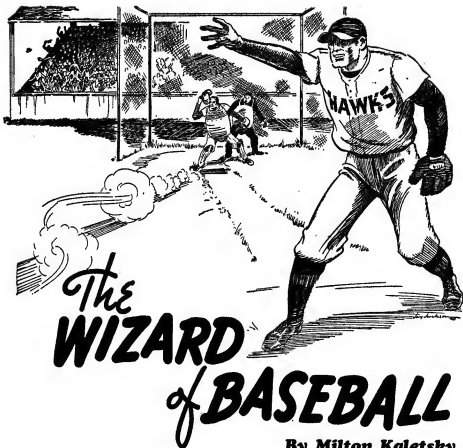
He paced back and forth excitedly, his short, heavy form as much in contrast with Lefty's tall, slender figure as his peppery words and explosive temper contrasted with Lefty's calm, slow-going, genial manners. Today Ricks was in an especially heated mood.

Leaning over the desk, Ricks pushed his lined,

homely face toward Lefty, wrinkling his ugly features into an uglier arrangement. "Why have we been in the cellar fer t'ree years?" he demanded. "It's mostly yer bum pitchin' and yer lousy battin'. Well, I ain't gonna pay no salary fer such stuff much longer. If you don't pick up, I'm gonna bust yuh right outa this two-bit league!" He banged the desk again, his face purple.

"The only thing you'll bust is an artery, if you don't cool off," growled Lefty. Hoisting himself up, he tramped disconsolately out the door marked "Hawkinsville Hawks. Western Baseball League. Joey Ricks, Mgr.", and left the clubhouse.

Slouching along with his supple, athletic figure stooped carelessly and his attractive face creased in



By Milton Kaletsky

worry, Lefty wandered down Main Street, meditating gloomily. Ricks was right. His hurling and swatting were rotten. So far in the three weeks of this season he'd lost six out of six, and as for his batting—better not even think of that. Looked like his dream of getting into the big leagues would remain just a dream and he might have to go back to driving a truck.

His aimless perambulations led to the huge Hawkinsville Drug Store, where you could buy anything from auto parts to zithers, even drugs. Lefty wandered in. If Ricks canned him, he could get a job as soda swisher here. All the kids in town would make this soda fountain their headquarters if he were the sundae architect, for Lefty was still a hero to Hawkinsville, even if he did lose every game, because he was

the only Hawkinsville native on the team.

A crash ended these thoughts. About his feet lay the wreckage of what had been, a moment ago, a neat stack of books. Under the manager's distinctly unfriendly glare, Lefty scooped up the volumes and restored order. One caught his eye. "The Key to Success!" exclaimed the jacket in huge letters. "This Book Has Unlocked the Door to Opportunity for Thousands! Only One Dollar!"

The title-page offered more information. "How to Develop Strong Will Power," by Rajah Hajar, B.S., M.A., Ph.D., LL.D., F.R.S.

Chapter One, "The Secret of Success," revealed its secret right off. It was Will Power, and more will power. Will power, strong will power, controlled will

power, developed will power,—these were the Stepping Stones to Startling Success.

Lefty was impressed. Lefty was so impressed he did an unprecedented thing: he bought a hook.

Back at the clubhouse, he joined the team in shoveling lunch into themselves. Scarcely noticing what he gulped, he read on and on, ignoring the wisecracks about Literary Lefty, the hookworm. To see anyone on that team with a book was quite a shock.

Without interrupting his fascinated reading, Lefty groped around on the table. "Pass the salt," he muttered. The salt cellar came into his hand. "Thanks," he acknowledged.

Across the table, Catcher Tony Lorenzi hlinked and shook his head. Joey Ricks noticed Tony's frown and asked anxiously, "Wassa matter? Feelin' sick?"

"No, nothin'," said Tony hastily. After all, he wasn't sure he'd seen the salt cellar slide down the table into Lefty's hand by itself. Maybe someone had pushed it. Still. . .

WHEN Lefty went on the mound that afternoon against the second-place Macon Marvels, he was practically oozing will power and confidence from every pore. At last he knew why he couldn't pitch or hit! At last he knew how to get the control and batting eye he needed! Will power! Just make up your mind to do something and you'll do it. The hook said so!

At five o'clock, a surprised Joey Ricks stared at a transformed Lefty Lopez. "Well!" he exclaimed, "that hawlin' out I gave yuh this mornin' done some good! Yuh won a game!"

"It was will power that done it," replied Lefty. "Not yer yellin'. From now on, when I want a ball to do something, brother, it does it!"

"Heck, I don't care how yuh do it," barked Ricks. "Just keep on doin' it."

Lefty kept on doing it, and as the season wore on Hawkinsville gradually became aware that something remarkable was happening to its team. It was winning games! It was actually way up in sixth place, after three years in the cellar. Then in a week it was in fifth place. When the Hawks climbed still higher, into the first division, they got half a column in the town newspaper, the *Hawkinsville Weekly Howl*. When the team pushed its way into third place, it got half a page. And when it battered its way into second place, close behind the league leader, the paper plastered the miracle over the whole front page.

This marvelous advance was the work of one man,—Lefty Lopez,—who was hurling almost every game and winning them all. When the other seven teams faced him they swore enough for seven armies, because what he was doing to their batting averages could make a rattlesnake cry. His terrific curves seemed to swoop and swerve in a dozen directions, yet nearly always crossed the plate. And his hitting! As the team climbed, so did Lefty's batting average. It was over .500 now and still rocketing up. He slammed homers

that made Babe Ruth and Joe DiMaggio look like the weakest hitters in an Old Men's Home; and he did all this, he claimed, just by exerting his will power.

But in spite of success, Lefty was secretly worried by his new powers. Sometimes they seemed out of control, sometimes they seemed to do things by themselves. Or did they? For instance, when he bent down to pick up a bat, did it really jump up a little into his hand or was he just screwy? When he was pitching, why did the ball sometimes curve in a way he couldn't possibly make it go, so that Tony, taken by surprise, couldn't catch it? They almost lost two games because of these queer wild pitches, and Joey swore the air purple. And that time in the locker room when he tried to sneak a quick smoke before a game, he had dropped all the cigarettes out of the pack, and when he went to pick them up, they jumped back in themselves. No! That couldn't be! He was just seeing things.

Occasionally Lefty was sorry he had bought that hook. But it fascinated him and he kept on studying it. . .

A STRANGER arriving in Hawkinsville the evening of July First would have been sure the entire town was insane. The streets were filled with screaming kids dancing a new dance, the *Lefty Limp*; total strangers were slapping each other on the back and buying each other drinks; and wives who didn't know home plate from a bread plate were asking their husbands, "Goodness, what's baseball all about that gets you so excited?"

Their husbands and kids had four good reasons for getting excited. That afternoon four miracles had happened:

The Hawks had tied with the Winterdale Wildcats for first place! The oldest inhabitant of Hawkinsville could hardly remember when the Hawks had been anywhere near first place before.

Lefty had hit his 61st, 62nd and 63rd homers, breaking even the major league record of Babe Ruth, and the season was only half over!

Lefty had pitched both games of a double-header and had won both!

But it was the fourth miracle that really made the telegraph wires burn. In a hundred cities, sports writers stared pop-eyed at the box scores of Lefty's double victory, unable to believe the figures. In Chicago, New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Cincinnati, big league scouts took one look at the amazing news, dashed to buy railroad tickets to Hawkinsville and hurried off with contracts in their pockets. Every team in the majors wanted this marvel, this Mathewson-Hubbell-Grove-Ruffing-Feller, who had just performed the greatest feat in baseball history. For Lefty the Great, Lefty the Miraculous, Lefty the Wonderful had pitched two no-hit no-run games in one afternoon!

In Hawkinsville, where carnival reigned, and in Winterdale, where the whole town worried, there was

only one topic of conversation: the three-game series between the two leaders, beginning on July Fourth.

THAT July Fourth started out to be Hawkinsville's greatest. At one o'clock, the team, the city officials and citizens gathered at the town hall. The Mayor threw away the speech he'd written on the glorious events that happened on July Fourth, 1776, and spoke instead on the glorious events that were going to happen that day, July Fourth, 1940.

Reporters and photographers from the big cities crowded around Lefty, bombarding him with questions on what he ate for breakfast and whether he preferred blondes or brunettes and what was the secret of his success.

"Will power!" exclaimed Lefty, getting warmed up on his favorite subject. "Yes sir, when you got strong will power, you can do anythin' you want, make a ball go where you want, hit a ball just where you want, anythin'! Watch me today, boys, you'll see real will power in action!"

At two o'clock, the entire town paraded to the stadium. Some three hundred people from Winterdale were there already, cheering their Wildcats. When the Wildcats' first baseman took a drink, they cheered. When the left outfielder shifted his chawin' terhakker from one cheek to another, they cheered. When nothing happened, they cheered anyway.

At two-thirty, Umpire William Gote roared "Play ball!" and there were more cheers. Poor old Billy Gote! Just because his name really was Billy Gote, everyone called him Nanny.

During the first four innings, this historic game seemed normal. Lefty fanned the first three Wildcats. Big Tom Jones, hurler for the Wildcats, returned the compliment by fanning the first three Hawks. Lefty came back and polished off the fourth, fifth and sixth Wildcats with just nine pitched balls. Jones used ten to set down the next three Hawks who faced him.

In the press box, the typewriters clattered. The reporters agreed these two pitchers looked sensational.

The game's first break came in the third inning. Kelly, the Wildcats' walloping wonder, swaggered to the plate, slapped Lefty's first toss clean out of sight, and trotted around the diamond while the three hundred Winterdalers made enough noise for a thousand people.

Lefty swore and took a double revenge by striking out the next three Wildcats and then getting up to bat himself and whamming his 64th four-bagger. Just to impress the big-league scouts, he placed the hit exactly where Kelly's homer had gone. The scouts got interested. A swell pitcher who could also hit!

Back to strikeouts went the game until, with two out and none on in the first of the fifth inning, Kelly strolled up again. The Winterdalers whistled and shrieked for another homer. Kelly waved his cap and obliged, slapping the second pitch out of baseball forever.

The reporters' typewriters clattered louder. This guy Kelly was another sensation, and finding three such sensations in one hick-town league was a fourth sensation in itself.

On the mound, Lefty chewed his glove and burned. How the hell could he impress the scouts if Kelly matched his hitting and Jones matched his pitching? Well, he'd show them a thing or two now! He fanned the last Wildcat with three fast strikes, so fast they felt like hot potatoes to Tony, even through his thick mitt. The big-leaguers got more interested in Lefty. This was speed, real speed!

THE trouble began in the second half of that inning.

Big Tom Jones slipped a little, and when Lefty came to bat there were two on and none out. Jones looked at the murder in Lefty's eye and called his catcher into conference. "I'm gonna pass him," he said. "If I don't he'll whack the pill clear outa town."

"Yeah," agreed the catcher. "He's got home run written all over him."

Jones went back to the pitcher's box, took a long stretch and threw the ball two feet outside. Lefty wondered whether Jones was getting wild. The next toss was even wider and Lefty got suspicious. When the third pitch passed above five feet outside, Lefty guessed Jones's trick.

"Put it over, you monkey!" he howled. Gawd, what could he do with the ball yards away? Here was his chance to put the ball game on ice and Jones was walking him!

"Put it over!" he squawked. "Are ya afraid, ya pie-eyed baboon?"

Jones grinned and nodded as he got the ball back. He was afraid all right. Besides, he wanted to win this game, not make Lefty and Hawkinsville happy.

As the fourth pitch whipped toward him, Lefty moaned. He'd need a fishing pole to touch that. But he had to hit it! He just had to!

The catcher leaped to the side, but the ball never got to him. Out from Lefty's hands flew the bat, there was a loud crack, then a thud as the bat fell to the ground, and the amazed spectators saw a white speck fly over the fence, carom off a building, tear through a billboard and finally drop out of sight.

Lefty remained by the plate, staring open-mouthed at the bat. What the heck had happened?

"Run!" bellowed Joey Ricks. "Run, yuh paralyzed idiot!" Lefty ran. The two Hawks on base ran. So did all the other players. They all ran to shout at Umpire Nanny.

"He t'rew the bat at the hall! It ain't legal!"

"Take him outa the game!"

"It's poofeckly O.K.!"

"You dirty crooks!"

"Quiet!" screamed Nanny, his red face running up through all the other colors of the spectrum and settling down to a nice apoplectic violet. "I'll settle this! Hey, Tompkins!" he called to the other umpire. "C'm' here!"

The two umpires walked off to confer, shaking their beads in perplexity. Back at home plate, the furor continued and spread to the stands, where the three hundred Winterdalers were having 294 arguments and six fights with Hawkinsvillites.

By the Hawks' dugout, Lefty was explaining to Joey Ricks. "But I didn't throw the bat! It just jumped outa my hands itself!"

"I don't care if the bat said 'boo!' to the ball and scared it away. We gotta get them runs!"

But the Hawks didn't get the runs. The umpires announced they would call that last pitch a fourth ball.

"Take yer base," Nanny told Lefty.

"You can't gyp us like that," wailed Ricks. "I'll have ya suspended!"

"Oh yeah," snarled Nanny, "and maybe I'll bounce out that smart pitcher of yours for pullin' that trick! If you don't like my decision, appeal to the league commissioner. But now, play ball!"

"What! I ain't gettin' the hit?" shouted Lefty angrily. "You just wait," he barked at the grinning Wildcats. "I'll put 'em over so fast you won't see 'em!"

Off to first base he tramped, muttering and threatening. The bases were filled, but Jones tightened up and got out of the hole with three nifty strikeouts. The Wildcats led, two to one.

Lefty climbed back on the mound, determined to show some real pitching. Now he'd show them what will power could do! And what he showed in that fateful sixth inning would never be forgotten by those who saw it, and not by Lefty either.

THE Wildcats' shortstop faced him first. As Lefty started to wind up, the ball leaped from his fingers. An instant later there was a quick *smack-thud-sing* as the ball bounced off Tony's mitt, slammed into Nanny's chest protector so hard his breath came out with a *swish!* and banged into the screening. Tony dove for the ball and snatched it in bewilderment. He hadn't seen that ball coming. Neither had the batter. Nor had Nanny. Not anyone else, not even Lefty.

As Nanny gasped for breath, he wondered what to call the pitch. "Sus . . . sus . . . strike," he finally choked. After all, he'd been calling practically nothing but strikes anyway all day, so he figured this was one also. Still he was worried. If his eyes were going bad on him. . . .

Back to Lefty went the ball. He regarded it curiously. Looked like any other baseball, but—. Again the sphere tore itself from his hand and streaked away. Into Tony's mitt it crashed, so hard he fell over. Tony's hands felt as if he'd stopped a cannon ball, but he held it.

The batter blinked in dismay. There was nothing for him to hit at except a breeze as the ball zipped past.

Poor old Nanny raised his hand to show another strike, moaning softly to himself. Now he was sure his eyes were double-crossing him.

Seizing the ball tightly when it reached him again, Lefty tried to examine it. In his hands it squirmed and wriggled like a live thing until it twisted free. Then off to the plate it whizzed, nothing visible except a white flash.

"Strike three!" cried Nanny, hearing another thud in the catcher's mitt. He almost wept at the thought of his predicament. A fine thing,—an umpire who couldn't see the ball!

Up in the stands, the big league scouts sat with bulging eyes. Such speed was absolutely unbelievable. "Gawd!" exclaimed one, "he must have a rifle up his sleeve to shoot out them pitches!"

Now the Wildcats' third baseman sauntered up. The ball lay quietly in Lefty's hands, too quietly. Lefty hesitated. Something was definitely rotten in the Hawkinsville Stadium, but he didn't know what . . . yet. Well, he couldn't hold the ball forever so he pitched, and the ball left his hand with a prayer riding along with it, begging it to behave itself.

Apparently the ball didn't hear the prayer. Straight over the center of the plate, waist-high, it flashed, too fast for the batter to swing at it. Tony put up his mitt but he didn't catch it. A foot in front of him, the ball stopped dead; shot back over the plate half way to Lefty, flashed forward over the plate again; stopped once more, whirled back, and finally flew over the platter a third time into Tony's astonished paws. He held it out at arm's length as if it'd been a bomb ready to burst. What the heck was going on anyway?

"Strike one two three," gibbered Nanny, clapping his hands to his eyes. Now he was sure he was nuts. First he couldn't see things that really happened, then he saw things that couldn't happen.

The dazed batter staggered backward and wandered away, muttering and shaking his head. He wasn't sure of his sanity either.

A horrible suspicion came to Lefty. "My will power's running wild!" he wailed to Joey, who dashed over from short. "I can't control it any more!"*

Joey tore out his last five hairs and scrambled down to where Umpire Nanny was besieged by a screeching mob of Wildcats. Joey stormed through them.

"The ball crossed the plate three times," he roared into Nanny's left ear, "so it's three strikes an' the man's out!"

"Lefty threw it only once," bellowed the Wildcats' manager into Nanny's right ear, "so it's just one strike!"

"Three!"

*Lefty's mind apparently is controlling the ball through actual physical forces which he was exerting through no physical medium. This is not a new idea. Gravitation, electrical and magnetic attraction and repulsion, are other physical forces that act at a distance in a similar manner. Incidentally, Lefty's mind must have been doing all this subconsciously, because he was desperately trying to control the ball. But his subconscious mind was stronger. This might have been a form of self-hypnotism. A hypnotized subject, for instance, may lift weights far in excess of his normal ability without difficulty. Thus it does not seem improbable that Lefty's hypnotic forces might be able to control a material object through an extension of mental force science seems to reluctantly admit must exist.—Ed.

"One!"

"Three!"

"One!"

The stands took up the chant. "Three!" yelled Hawkinsville. "One!" screamed Winterville. Immediately the 294 arguments and six fights turned into 294 fights and six arguments.

Nanny tore off his mask and jumped up and down on it. His violet face passed into the ultra-violet now and his blood pressure was somewhere up in the stratosphere.

"Quiet!" he yodeled. The clamor around him faded to just a hullabaloo. "According to the rules, that was three strikes. The man's out. *Quiet!*" he bawled, as the uproar began again. "No more arguments. You can appeal to the league commissioner. Gawd! I wish he was here now! I'd let him have this lousy job! And as for you," he blasted at Lefty, "one more monkey business like that and out you go. Now play ball. G'wan, you heard me, play ball!"

IT was the first half of the sixth inning, Wildcats leading two to one, two out and nobody on base. . . .

A hasty conference among the Wildcats brought a change in the batting order. Kelly the Mighty advanced again.

Lefty signaled a walk to Tony. No more hits for Kelly today. Besides, Lefty wanted revenge for the walk he'd gotten instead of a home run.

Tony stepped aside, waiting for the first throw which he knew would be a straight easy toss too far outside for Kelly to reach. To his surprise, halfway along the ball swerved sharply in and headed directly toward the plate. Tony leaped back, while Kelly tensed expectantly. Oh boy, that pill was coming right where he loved it! He couldn't miss that! He swung a mighty swing . . . and missed,—missed so hard he whirled completely around and flopped flat on his face. Staggering to his feet, he saw why he'd missed. Three feet in front of the plate the ball had stopped dead and was hanging there motionless in the air. As Kelly and Tony and Nanny and Lefty and everyone else gaped incredulously, the ball shot forward, landed in Tony's mitt and fell from his paralyzed hands.

With bulging eyes, Nanny croaked "Strike!" indistinctly, gurgled, spluttered, and slumped down in a fit.

Lefty ran in. "Cantcha hold it?" he barked at Tony.

"Yeah? Wassia idea curvin' it after yuh signaled a straight pitch? And wassia idea the whole goofy pitchin' yuh been doin' today?"

Lefty shrugged helplessly. How could he explain that the ball was inventing its own tricks?

Joey Ricks dasbed up, swearing at Lefty. "This is goin' too far. I didn't mean to tell yuh, but the Big Shot himself is here. Yuh'll queer yer chances wit' this screwball stuff! The big leagues want *ball-players*, not *magicians*. Baseball is a *business*."

Lefty wailed in dismay. "It ain't me that's doin'

them things. It's the ball; it's got a will power of its own."

Ricks snorted in disgust. "One more silly crack like that and I'll bench you!" He stalked away.

When Nanny recovered consciousness, he begged Tompkins to exchange places with him. Glumly, Tompkins agreed and Nanny wobbled down to first base. "Play ball!" shouted Tompkins, getting behind the catcher and glaring at Lefty.

Back on the mound, Lefty didn't try to place or curve the ball. He just threw it.

Again the ball arrived at a perfect spot for Kelly, but Kelly was smart. He'd wait to see what that crazy ball would do. So he just pretended to swing, then jerked the bat to a halt. Sure enough, the ball slowed and stopped, waiting for him to finish swinging before it crossed the plate.

With a malicious grin, Kelly stepped forward and slashed at the ball floating in the air. He couldn't miss such a stationary target. He swung, a terrific swing, and missed again, for the ball dodged back out of range of the bat.

"What the hell?" squawked Kelly, purple with rage. He jumped at the ball, waving his club menacingly, swinging back and forth madly, trying to hit the elusive sphere which whirled and curved and dodged and always evaded the gyrating bat. Suddenly the ball tried to slip around past him. With a flying leap, Kelly landed on the plate and blocked the way. The ball at once backed away about fifteen feet and shot straight at his face. He ducked, and the ball flashed over his head into Tony's hands. Tony threw it back as fast as he could. He wouldn't hold onto that lunatic ball for even a second.

"Strike two!" shouted Tompkins.

ON all sides, spectators and sports writers and big league scouts were swarming down onto the field. The game was completely forgotten. All anyone cared about was that ball and its fantastic duel with Kelly.

He stood in the batter's box, clutching the bat in a murderous fit of boiling anger. "Do that again, you cross-eyed monkey of a southpaw screwball!" he shrieked angrily at Lefty. "C'mon, do that again. I'll smash that cockeyed ball to bits!"

"O. K., here she comes," said Lefty grimly and let fly. The ball twisted and flew over toward third base, swung around behind the pitcher and danced into the outfield, zigzagged back into the infield, corkscrewed, jitterbugged, cavorted, whirled up and down—did everything except approach the plate.

"C'mere and get socked!" howled Kelly. The ball obliged by flashing temptingly close to him. Then off down the first base line flew the ball.

"By golly!" Kelly shouted and ran in hot pursuit. Around first and toward second the ball sailed, with Kelly right behind, yelling and shaking his club. "Stop and lemme swat ya!" he bellowed, and as he screamed this challenge he suddenly guessed what that crazy ball

(Concluded on page 92)

50 MILES DOWN

by
Peter Horn

Dr. Horace Keith didn't know the horror that existed 50 miles below the surface of the earth, or perhaps he might not have made the trip in his iron mole

"MR. BLAKE!" the amplifiers were shouting. "Important! Urgent! Call for Mr. Blake!"

Bob Blake hesitated before entering the reception room of Transplanet Newsreels. His strong, tanned face twisted into a worried scowl. He whispered a curse under his breath as he saw, through the partly open door, a mob of reporters swarming about the frantic receptionist.

"There isn't any news yet," she was saying shrilly, nervous tension edging her voice. "No one's heard—"

"Where's Blake?" a reporter demanded. "He can't keep this hushed up forever, if that's what he's trying to do. The public wants to know what's happened to Keith's Borer. Why did the signals stop last night? Is the man still alive down there, fifty miles underground? We want—"

Biting his lip, Blake drew back. It wouldn't do to let the reporters see him. Not until he had some definite news. But—there was news, there must be, or the boss wouldn't have televised Blake to return immediately from Keith's farm ten miles away.

Blake raced along the corridor to his office. He

slipped in, closed the door behind him, and locked it. "What's up, Andy?" he asked. "Did we get a signal or a message from Keith?"

A plump little man was perched on the edge of Blake's big desk, shuffling through stacks of clippings and film-stills. He glanced up, peering through a monocle that he wore in one eye—not through affectation, but to compensate for weak vision.

"Lord, I'm glad you're here," Andy Carruthers said nervously. "Those damn reporters are like vultures. They've been trying to make me admit the Borer's cracked up."

"Has it?" Blake asked. The smaller man pushed a button on the desk.

"I don't know, Bob. The boss told me to buzz him when you got here. I think there's a message from Keith, on our own code narrow-beam, but the boss wouldn't even trust me with it."

An annunciator buzzed sharply. A distant voice said, "Mr. Blake, please remain in your office. A communication is being sent you immediately."

"All right," Blake acknowledged, and sat down behind the desk, lighting a cigarette. Frowning, he looked around.

Everywhere were reminders of the Borer—"Keith's Folly," as the newspapers had dubbed it. On the wall, just developed, was a huge picture taken not forty-eight hours ago, showing the Borer just before it had made the test trip into the depths of the earth. In the background of the picture could be seen a farmhouse and barn, but these were dwarfed by the great Borer, a thick cylinder of gleaming metal that stood upright on one end. In its hull a circular door was ajar, and two men were shown entering the port—Dr. Horace Keith, the inventor, and his nephew Joseph Denton, who had accompanied Keith on the experimental trip. Newsreel-men and photographers crowded toward a roped-off area surrounding the ship.

Blake thumbed through the innumerable clippings and pictures on his desk. All dealt with the Borer. "Keith's Folly . . . Oil and coal trusts interested in inventor's dive . . ."

Blake glanced out the window. "They're locking the gate, I see. But that won't keep the reporters out. They're just waiting for a chance to splash a big headline on their rags—*Keith Trapped Fifty Miles Underground*, or something like that."

Carruthers nodded. "I know. But maybe he *is* trapped—"

"The Borer is fool-proof," Blake frowned. His face was set in grim lines—a huge blond Viking of a man, with cold blue eyes and tawny-colored hair that fell in a tangled mass over his bronzed forehead. "No, Andy—if Keith's in trouble, it isn't the Borer's fault. I'd stake my reputation on that."

"You've done that already," Carruthers said quietly, eying Blake through his monocle. "How much publicity would Keith have got if you hadn't argued the boss into playing up the Borer in our newsreels? Every other news-agency treated Keith



A man came from the wrecked Borer's sheltered but still workable door

like a lunatic. And they're just waiting for a chance to jump on us and say I told you so."

"The Borer is practical," Blake reiterated. "I've known Keith for a long time, and the man's a genius. He used to have money, but he's sunk it all in the Borer. He believes in it. And it's worth a fortune to oil and coal interests. That's the whole thing, Andy. Some of the biggest underground fuel and mining trusts in the world are waiting to see if Keith makes the test trip successfully. If he does, he can name his own price for the Borer. But if anything goes wrong—" Blake shook his head worriedly. "Andy, go out and stall the reporters again. Tell them anything—but convince them that everything's all right."

Carruthers unlocked the door and went out. "I'll try," he said over his shoulder. "But we've got to give them some real news in a hurry, or they'll just use their imaginations and print anything."

THAT was the worst of it, Blake thought, puffing at his cigarette. What could have happened to Keith? Why had the signals stopped coming? . . . Anyway, public confidence in the Borer, already wavering, must not be shaken further. That would mean financial ruin for Keith—and, for Blake, it would mean the loss of his reputation and perhaps his job with Transplanet Newsreels. He, too, had staked a good deal on "Keith's Folly."

Someone knocked on the door. In response to Blake's "Come in," a messenger entered and deposited an envelope, sealed with red wax, on the desk. Blake waited till the boy had left and then opened the message.

His face whitened as he read the brief communication. He scarcely heard Carruthers enter. The little man waited till Blake looked up. His eyes asked a question.

"It's a crack-up," Blake said through thinned lips. "Or worse. We got an S. O. S. from the Borer an hour ago. No details. Just a call for help."

Carruthers let out a shrill whistle. "A crack-up! That means—" He left the sentence unfinished.

Blake's eyes were like chips of blue ice. "Fifty miles underground . . . Good God, what a place to die."

"It—it's tough, Boh," Carruthers said awkwardly. "You're—" Blake swung round angrily to face the other.

"Tough? What are you trying to say? That it's tough because I'm washed up—out of a job because I hacked the wrong man? Listen, Andy. Doc Keith and his nephew are trapped down there, facing darkness and suffocation and death. And you say it's tough . . . well, no man should have to die like that, and Keith's one of my oldest friends. I'm going after him, Andy."

Carruthers' jaw sagged. "What?"

Blake pointed to the picture on the wall. "See that barn beyond the Borer? Near the farmhouse?

There's another Borer in there, a duplicate. Keith didn't take any chances. He built the two machines at the same time—afraid of sabotage, maybe, or perhaps he guessed that something like this might happen. Before Keith left, I told him that I'd come after him if anything went wrong. I know how to handle a Borer; he showed me. And—"

"It's suicide," Carruthers said quietly. "If the first Borer cracked up, the chances are a hundred to one that the same thing will happen to the second ship. Do you realize that?"

"The Borer is mechanically perfect. I don't know what's happened to Keith, but I'm going to find out." Blake patted the smaller man's shoulder. "Go out and stall the reporters again. Maybe there's still a chance. If I can bring Keith and Denton back to the surface, and prove the Borer's practical, publicity won't hurt anybody. In the meantime, stall as hard as you can."

Blake picked up a compact camera from the desk and slid a reel of thin-wire film into place. "Oh, and get a fast car around to Gate 3. Make sure nobody sees you. Want to drive me out to Keith's farm?"

"Right," Carruthers said tersely, and went out. Blake took several rings of dull black metal, about six inches in diameter, from a drawer. These he placed in his pocket, together with the camera. They were extra reels of wire-film, protected by a special—and extremely expensive—case of metal tubing.

Blake let himself out into the corridor. Some distance away he caught sight of a small blond girl who was staring at him sharply. Hastily he dodged around a corner, and made his way to Gate 3. There Carruthers was waiting, in a small, speedy runabout.

"All set," the latter called. "Hop in."

Blake obeyed. But before he had settled himself in the seat he felt urgent fingers digging into his arm, and turned swiftly. A girl was standing on the running-board, the same one he had glimpsed in the passage. She was very pretty, but that meant nothing to Blake now.

The girl said swiftly, "Mr. Blake! Have you heard from Doctor Keith? Is he—"

"Sorry. No news for release yet. Get going, Andy."

Carruthers depressed the clutch. The car began to move. Abruptly, into the girl's brown eyes sprang a light of anger. "Wait!" she said, still clinging to the car's door. "You've got to—"

"Get off!" Blake snapped. Then he paused. A small, curiously-shaped gun had leaped into the girl's hand, and she held it steadily aimed at Blake's head. It was, he saw, merely an ammonia-pistol—but it meant delay, if nothing worse. And now every moment counted.

Carruthers slowed down. Blake moved swiftly. With one hand he knocked up the pistol-barrel and with the other pushed at the girl's face. He had no time to be gentle. His open palm smacked against her soft mouth and tumbled the girl from the running-

board of the slowly moving car.

"Get going!" Blake snapped at Carruthers. The car sprang forward.

"Hurt her?"

"No," Blake looked over his shoulder. "She's all right. Getting up now. Sorry I had to push her so ungentlemanly, but—" He shrugged. "These damn reporters!"

He pulled his hat low over his eyes. "Keep to the back roads, Andy. Someone might see us and trail us. I don't know how long we can keep this business hushed up, but the longer the better."

CARRUTHERS drove like a demon, squinting through his monocle, his round face quite expressionless. It was not long before they swung in through an open gate and halted within a short distance of Keith's farmhouse. The barn was not far away, and a roped-off area surrounded the gaping hole left by the Borer's descent. The farm seemed deserted. Blake frowned as he got out of the car.

"There should be a guard here. Wonder what happened to him? And the barn door's open, too. Funny . . ."

They entered. In the huge, gloomy structure the shell of the duplicate Borer gleamed dully, towering to the cobwebby, shadowed rafters. Blake opened the port and peered inside.

"Well, this is it. I don't think I'll have much trouble in finding Keith. I'll head toward the center of gravity, and, besides, the first Borer's automatically sending out a radio guide-beam."

He clambered into the ship and switched on the light.

The control-room leaped into bright visibility. Grid-screens on the walls showed the presence of air-renewers. The controls were built into a thick column that was set into the metallic floor. Blake's eyes drifted past that column, and then abruptly swung back. He saw movement—

"Raise your hands," a cold voice said crisply.

A man rose from where he had been hiding behind the controls. He was a thick-set, swarthy fellow with sneering mouth and small eyes almost obscured by shaggy brows. And in his hand was a heavy Luger.

"Don't move," said the ambusher. "I don't wish to kill you, Mr. Blake. Because you're the only man now who knows how to operate a Borer."

Blake said nothing. His face was expressionless, his arms were lifted rigidly. Beside him Carruthers stirred, then froze again as an angry light leaped into the killer's eyes.

"Careful!" he said, and was silent, listening. Then he resumed, after a quick glance at the open port. "I thought I could operate a Borer, but luckily I need not take the risk now. Your arrival was well-timed—for me. But it was not entirely unexpected. After my—my assistants broke the code S. O. S. Doctor Keith sent out, I thought you might come here."

"Who are you?" Blake asked.

"You may call me—Smith."

Blake's lips thinned. "Not one of the European Smiths?" he asked meaningly.

The other's eyes were suddenly hooded. "You are clever. Yes, my friend, we are going on a long trip, to a certain European country—and the Borer will travel underground, beneath the Atlantic. You see, this is a tremendous war weapon. A weapon my country needs."

Before Blake could reply, there was a sudden interruption. A girl's voice said, not quite steadily, "Drop that gun! Quick!"

Snarling, Smith whirled. In the open port stood the blond girl Blake had knocked from the running-board of the car. She held the ammonia-pistol leveled at Smith, a futile weapon against the murderous, heavy Luger.

But, for a second, the foreign agent's attention was distracted. His gun barked viciously as Blake hurled himself forward. The bullet sang out through the door, missing the girl by inches.

Blake crashed into Smith, and the two men went down together. They were a tangled, writhing knot on the ship's floor. Abruptly Smith's mouth gaped open; he shouted peremptory words in an unfamiliar tongue. His fingers stabbed up at Blake's eyes.

The latter jerked his head aside. The two men were jammed into a narrow space behind the control column, where Carruthers could not approach close enough to aid his friend. With an unexpected motion Smith hurried his face in Blake's shoulder, and the newsreel man felt the agent's hot breath on his skin. Sharp teeth just missed their mark—the jugular vein—as Blake got the heel of his hand under Smith's jaw and drove the killer's head back. He tried futilely to writhe free.

Vicious fingers tightened about his throat. The snarling face of Smith loomed up like the mask of a devil. An agonizing pain constricted Blake's neck under that crushing grip. He felt the strength draining from him.

Faintly he heard the trample of running feet and the shouting of voices. The girl cried, "Somebody's coming!" He heard her scramble into the ship.

Smith's "assistants!" The agent must have summoned them from nearby—the farmhouse, perhaps—when he had cried out for aid. A light of baleful triumph sprang into Smith's jet eyes; his fingers dug deeper into Blake's throat. Carruthers aimed a blow that fell futile, inches short of its mark.

Writhing painfully, Blake again got the heel of his hand under Smith's chin. He put all his strength into one jolting blow. The agent's head jerked back; there was a dull thump as it smashed against the metal wall. He made a curious coughing sound deep in his throat—and went limp.

Blake scrambled up and whirled toward the doorway. He caught a glimpse of a dozen men running into the barn—men armed with guns, swarthy, foreign-looking thugs who resembled Smith. A bullet

whipped past Blake to flatten against the inside of the ship. Hastily the newsreel man slammed the port shut and slid a bolt into place. He looked at it doubtfully, and then glanced at Carruthers and the girl, who were standing tensely beside him.

"That wasn't built to hold," he muttered—and then whirled toward the instrument column as a heavy thud came against the door. He pressed buttons and pushed a lever. "Sorry," he said between his teeth. "It's the only thing I can do."

THE floor dropped out from under them. The Borer lurched sickeningly. Smith's body rolled over; the girl was flung into Carruthers' arms. Blake clung desperately to the controls.

No more blows thudded against the port. Already the attackers were fifty feet away. And still the Borer plunged down silently into the unknown abyss of the inner earth!

Blake looked at the girl. "Sorry I had to hit you a while ago," he said. "And thanks for—helping out." He indicated the unconscious Smith with a meaning gesture.

"That's all right. I guess you thought I was a reporter." She smiled wanly at Blake's startled expression. "I'm Susan Morley. Dr. Keith's niece."

"Good Lord! You're the little kid in pigtails I used to see running around the farm here?"

Susan nodded, patting her hair into place. "I've been away at school. Vassar. When I heard the television reports, I got worried about my uncle, and—well, here I am."

"I'm sorry," Blake said, a queer note in his voice. "It makes it—rather hard. The way the Borer is built, it'll take two days to reverse it again for a descent. By that time your uncle's air supply will be gone. So you've got to go along."

Susan's face went a little pale, but her eyes met Blake's steadily. "We're on our way down now, aren't we?" she asked.

"Yes, but—"

"Then keep going." At the look in Blake's eyes she came forward, gripping his arms with soft, urgent fingers. Involuntarily the man tensed at Susan's nearness.

"You've got to! It's the only thing to do—don't you see? If you turn back now, you're murdering my uncle. You're his only chance! You haven't the right to take that chance away from him!"

Blake rubbed his forehead. "But . . . what about you?"

The look in Susan's eyes was sufficient answer. Blake turned toward Carruthers, and the latter nodded slightly.

"All right," the newsreel man said. "You win, Susan. And . . . I only hope we'll be in time."

The hours dragged on slowly. Only the instruments, and the changes in the vibration of the ship, told the travelers that they were moving at all. There were no windows, for nothing but the toughest rein-

forced metal could withstand the frightful pressure. Once the Borer encountered a sandy stratum, and the giddy plunge was vertiginous. Then came granite, and the vehicle dropped more slowly.

Blake watched a thick, hollow glass tube set in the wall. A stream of pulverized rock fled up constantly through this, brought in through a tiny aperture in the hull. The granite-gray specks gave place to a trickle of dull red.

Carruthers rose from the bound body of Smith, who was still unconscious. "He's safe for a while, Bob. Lucky that rope was in the locker."

The Borer slid sidewise as Blake fought with the controls. "Got to keep her in plumb," he grunted. "This is ticklish work."

Susan came to stand beside him. "How does the ship operate, anyway?"

Blake's face lit up. "Your uncle's a genius. He used a new form of radioactive energy to expand matter. In the nose of the Borer, right under us, are thousands of tiny projectors. And the bow works on a pivot—a universal joint—so I can turn the ship any way I want."

"I—I don't quite understand."

"Well, let's put it this way. Matter is composed of atoms, you know—electrons spinning around their nuclei, like tiny solar systems. In a heavy metal like neutronium the electrons are packed closely together. In a gas, they're further apart. That's why we can walk through gas, and not through neutronium."

"You mean the projectors turn rock into gas?"

Blake was finding relief from the nervous tension in explaining Keith's theories to the girl. "Something like that. Atomic structure is expanded, and the electrons are spread out further from their nuclei. Your uncle's projectors expand matter into something like an intangible sieve, and the Borer just drops right through."

"But how can you make it go up?" Susan asked.

"By pressure. There's a lot of that all around us, except at the nose, where the projectors are expanding matter. Ever squeeze a cake of soap in your hands?"

"O—I see. Yes, the soap pops right out."

"So does the Borer. The only danger is that the hull may collapse under the pressure. But I don't think it will. Your uncle made the trip all right." Blake paused abruptly. There was a little silence. Everyone was thinking the same thought. If Keith had made the trip successfully, he would not have sent out that frantic S. O. S.

An instrument on the controls went crimson. Blake deftly adjusted the guide lever. "We're getting close," he said between his teeth. "This may be dangerous—"

There was a sudden jolt. Without warning the Borer plummeted down. Carruthers cried, "It's a cave! We've broken through the roof!" Then he went sprawling.

If the Borer's nose had smashed into solid rock, the

concussion would have killed its passengers. But the projectors were working full blast, and as the ship hit the cavern's floor, the hard stone was instantly metamorphosed into yielding atomic structure. Thus the shock was cushioned. Blake hastily snapped off the projectors, breathing fast.

"We're here," he said, pointing to the instruments. "And it looks like the air's breathable outside, though Lord knows why this far underground."

Carruthers was opening the port. A dim, hazy light drifted in. Blake pushed his assistant aside and stepped out, staring around.

THEY were in a cave. A hundred feet above them the jagged roof could be glimpsed dimly. It was hazed and veiled by silvery fog, luminous clouds that sent a vague glow through the cavern as they drifted. In the distance the cave seemed to broaden into a gigantic hollow expanse, but the fog was too thick to show anything clearly. The rock wall near by, however, caught Blake's attention. It looked like durium ore, something that had been discovered only recently in the deepest mines—a metal with tremendous tensile strength. Blake's film-containers were made of durium, but the metal was not in common use, due to the difficulty and expense of reducing the mineral and separating it from other ores. Blake knew that he might be staring at a treasure trove, but he turned away to look for Keith's Borer.

Forty feet away it lay, its nose crushed into the rock floor. Its bent and twisted port moved outward.

The distant port swung open. A man scrambled out, carrying a lean figure across his shoulders. Brandishing a gun, he fled toward Blake.

"Keep back!" he shouted. "Stay in your ship!"

There was a confused melee. Blake was flung back, off balance, and fell inside the Borer, under writhing bodies. The newcomer wriggled free, sprang up, and slammed the door, breathing hard. He holted it and leaned weakly against the door.

"My God!" he whispered. "That was close! But they couldn't have got in—"

Blake rose, to face Joe Denton, Keith's nephew. "What are you talking about?" he asked slowly.

The other nodded. He was a small, wiry man with curly black hair and boyish features. "Wait a minute. Till I get a grip on myself. I've been through hell—"

A cry burst from Susan's white lips. She was staring, wide-eyed, at the prostrate body on the floor, the man Denton had carried into the Borer. Blake followed her gaze. He recognized Doctor Keith.

And Keith was dead. The frail, white-haired man lay pitifully limp on the metallic floor. The back of his skull was smashed into bloody fragments.

Denton moistened his lips. "They—they got him. I couldn't leave his body down here. They may be cannibals, for all I know."

Blake fought down the sick grief that momentarily weakened him. He gripped Denton's shoulders hard.

"Calm down! Now—what is it?"

"Give me a drink first. I—I need it. Thanks . . . We broke into this cavern last night. The air was breathable, so we started to explore. And we found life here—invisible life."

"Invisible—what are you talking about?"

Denton licked dry lips. "I couldn't believe it either, at first. Not till I'd—felt them. Creatures who live down here, with feathery bodies and claw-like feet. They're intelligent, after a fashion." Denton swallowed with difficulty. "Too intelligent. One of them got hold of a gun, and it went off and killed him. After that there was no holding them. They killed my uncle before I could move to help him. I just managed to get into the ship in time."

Blake was trying to marshal his confused thoughts into some semblance of order. "Invisible life-forms? Yes . . . yes, I suppose it's possible . . . underground." He was trying to convince himself of an apparent impossibility. "A different sort of radiation might make cellular tissue completely transparent. There's a lot of durium ore here, and that stuff's got queer properties . . . but intelligent beings? Here?"

Denton shuddered. There was a look of sick horror in his dark eyes. "We made friends with their chief, Vardu. But he's the worst Erdtmann of them all—that's what we called them, Erdtmann. I harried the port, after they killed my uncle, but they kept trying to break into the ship. If I'd known how to operate the Borer—I tried to, but only jammed the controls. Then I sent out an S. O. S."

Blake said slowly, "I think I'll visit the other ship. I'm armed—and Keith had a camera with him. Those pix may be valuable."

"We took some pictures," Denton said, "but Vardu got hold of the camera. He tore it apart. Anyway, you can't go out there. I tell you those devils are invisible!"

Blake scratched his chin thoughtfully. Then, coming to a decision, he went to the port, unholted it, and gently drew it back a crack. Instantly the door was smashed toward him. The weight of unseen bodies was jammed against it.

Frantically Blake strove to shut the panel again. He felt something soft and feathery and unseen touch his face, and then Denton and Carruthers flung their bodies against the door. Slowly it closed, but even after the holt was slit into its socket there was an ominous thudding from outside on the heavy metal.

With a decisive grunt Blake went to the instrument panel and started the Borer. The ship dropped down. Then, as the nose turned on its universal joint, the vehicle slowly arced in a long curve.

The control room was swung freely inside the hull, and it gently pivoted as the Borer turned. Finally the ship's nose was above the passengers' heads, instead of beneath their feet as heretofore.

"We're on the way up," Blake said, relaxing somewhat. "But I'm going to pay a call on your friend Vardu again, Denton. A sub-machine gun ought to be

damn good insurance even against invisible beings."

"THEY'RE not human," Denton whispered. "Even their digestive system is—different. They eat rock, Blake."

"Rock? That's impossible."

"Well—they eat ore, I know. My uncle found out . . ." Denton glanced at the still corpse on the floor. "Their bodies secrete some glandular fluid that breaks down ore until it's in a form they can assimilate. They live on that stuff in the walls of the cavern—what'd you say it was?"

"Durlum ore," Blake said thoughtfully. "Even the termite does something rather like that. A very powerful enzyme might break down ore so that an Erdtmann might digest it—after all, they're utterly inhuman." A thought came to him, which he filed for future reference. It was pushed to the back of his mind by another.

Denton, of course, knew both Carruthers and Susan. But the body of Smith, the foreign agent, was in plain sight on the floor, and yet Denton had ignored the man. Why? Curiosity would be the natural reaction, one would think. But Denton did not seem to see Smith.

Purposely Blake said nothing. Instead, he found a map and made careful adjustments. Then he turned to the radio. In code, he wirelessly a brief account of what had happened, and requested an armed force to meet him at Keith's farm. The foreign agents might still be there, waiting.

Then all his attention was focused on the task of guiding the ship. It was not easy, for if the Borer hurt out of the ground under the farmhouse, the result would be catastrophic.

Luck was with Blake. Presently the Borer came to a halt, half buried in the earth, its nose aimed at the sky. Blake opened the door and blinked into the red sunset. His eyes adjusted themselves.

Flashlight bulbs popped and glared. At least a hundred people were in sight, reporters, cameramen, and police. They came rushing toward the ship like a wave. There were delighted shouts.

"There he is! There's the Borer!"

"Keep back! Back—"

Something, a subtle instinct of danger, made Blake turn suddenly. Through the roar of the mob he had heard a faint, ominous click. The click of a gun's hammer being drawn back—

A shot thundered deafeningly within the control room.

Blake sprang aside, pulling the door shut, a burning pain searing along his ribs. He stared with wide eyes at the sight of a gun—Smith's heavy Luger—hanging unsupported in empty air a few feet away. The trigger was contracting slowly.

One of the invisible Erdtmann was in the ship!

Susan and Denton cried out at the same time. The latter dived past Blake toward the door. Carruthers, cursing softly, sprang at the gun.

Blake was trying to keep Denton from reopening the door. The latter was frantic with terror, mouth- ing hysterical, meaningless words as he fought to escape. "Don't open the port!" Blake shouted, trying to watch Denton and the gun at the same time. He knew that, even though the Erdtmann was armed, he was at least within the ship. But once he got out, it would be impossible to locate him.

The gun hummed again. A shriek of agony burst from the bound Smith. The foreign agent's body arced convulsively against the floor and then went limp. Blood spurted from his chest.

The Luger went sailing across the room. It clattered metallically on the floor. Carruthers was wrestling with something invisible, and seemingly getting the worst of it. His lips were retracted in an agonized grin. Blake let go of Denton and sprang to help his friend.

His hands touched a sinuous body, feathery and strange. Simultaneously a burning pain in his palms made him cry out involuntarily. From outside the ship, a voice shouted a question.

Denton swung open the port and leaped out. The feathery form in Blake's grip writhed free and was gone. Feet pattered lightly on metal.

Blake snatched the gun and leaped out of the ship. In the gathering dust he saw wondering faces staring at him. The mob was pressing closer.

There was a sharp, surprised cry. A reporter went spinning sidewise, to crash heavily to the ground. Behind him, another man reeled and just saved himself from falling.

"Stop him!" Blake shouted, realizing how futile were his words even as he said them. "He's invisible—stop him, quick, before he gets away!"

Useless! Every eye was turned toward Blake. Voices asked insistent questions.

It would have taken minutes to explain. And by that time the Erdtmann would have made good his escape. Blake groaned and plunged forward through the mob.

Hands gripped him, halting his rush. He fought desperately, hopelessly, to free himself. For a moment the crowd thinned, and Blake saw the meadow stretching empty toward the distant fence.

Empty? The high grass rippled, and then the gate swung open and closed again, though apparently nothing touched it. It might have been the wind, but Blake knew it was not.

He relaxed. "All right. It's too late now. Who's in charge of the police here?"

A ruddy-faced man with a hristling white moustache pushed forward. "I am. Inspector Donovan's my name. What's wrong, Mr. Blake?"

But Blake didn't answer immediately. He was looking down at the trampled ground. What was wrong? An invisible savage was at large, a savage who could use a gun. An alien being whose body emitted an enzymic secretion that could eat away a man's skin and flesh as easily as it could crumble solid

rock. Blake's palms were still aching painfully . . . A chill wind blew in the gathering dust. Blake felt as though he had turned into ice as he looked down at a monstrous footprint in the dusk—a three-toed, clawed print that might have been made by a giant bird.

Death was walking unseen upon the earth.

THE newspapers printed long columns about the subterranean rescue, but said little about the Erdtmann. They were skeptical, and inclined to treat Blake's story as an attempted hoax. Even when Susan, Carruthers and Denton added their testimony, the papers preferred to wait, rather than spread such a fantastically sensational story over their front pages. The authorities were even wavier. Blake spent an angry hour with the Mayor and the District Attorney, and finally televised the Governor. But skepticism and red tape were too strong for him.

"There is such a thing as mass hypnotism," the Mayor had said pontifically. "I am not doubting your word. But I think we had better wait until—well—"

"Until somebody's murdered?" Blake said, with hot anger. "I tell you, this is the time to move, while the Erdtmann is still confused by finding himself in a new world."

But it had been hopeless. Only Inspector Donovan felt convinced that Blake was telling the truth, and he was overruled by his superiors. He had taken Blake aside later.

"My hands are pretty well tied," he said softly, pulling at his white moustache, "but I'm going to keep some men ready. If anything happens, give me a call, and we'll be along."

"Thanks," Blake shook the strong brown hand. "I may need you."

But so far he had not. Nearly twenty-four hours had passed, and there had been no sign of the invisible Erdtmann. Blake sat in his office, smoking and waving a lean finger at Carruthers.

"There are several possibilities. The Erdtmann's in a totally different environment now, and exposed to direct solar radiation. It may blind him. It may kill him, or even make him visible."

Carruthers nodded glumly. "Denton says he's sure the Erdtmann is Vardu, the chief, though he won't say why. Maybe—"

The door opened. Susan Morley came in, a suspicious pinkness about her eyes. Blake got up.

"What's up?" he asked. "Has Vardu—"

The girl bit her lip nervously. She was looking remarkably pretty nevertheless, in a gray tailored dress and a small blue hat from which golden hair cascaded.

"Bob," she said without preamble, "I've got to do something—break my uncle's will. He left everything to Joe Denton, and—" She paused at sight of the look in Blake's eyes. A warm flush mantled her cheeks. "Don't be a fool, Bob! I don't want a cent. I can earn my own living, but—don't you see—Uncle

Horace left the Borer to Joe. And he's trying to sell them to some foreign power!"

"Eh?" Blake leaned forward, frowning. "How d'you know?"

"I saw him just now—I listened outside the door, and he was talking to a foreign agent. A man who looked like that fellow Smith who tried to kill you yesterday. I opened the door and told Joe what I thought of him—"

"And?"

"He told me to mind my own business." Susan's small jaw set firmly. "I—"

"Uh-huh," Blake turned to the televisior. "Get me Joe Denton." Presently the face of Denton grew on the screen.

Without preamble Blake snapped, "Are you trying to sell the Borer to a foreign country?"

Denton's boyish face twisted in surprise; then it went darkly sullen. "That's my own affair," he said.

"I can dispose of my own property as I see fit."

"Sure you can. I just want to remind you, Denton, that no European power can attack America as long as the Atlantic is a barrier. But a fleet of Borers can drive under the Atlantic and smash every city from here to the coast. Did you think of that?"

"It's got nothing to do with me," Denton growled.

"If I want to sell the Borer, that's that. I'm selling it to a private concern."

Blake felt hot anger rising within him. "Sure! A private concern that takes orders from some European dictator. Damn it, Denton, you're an American, after all. You can't—"

There was no humor in Denton's vicious grin. "I won't be an American long. I'm sailing for Europe within the week."

Blake struck at the switch, effacing Denton from the screen. His voice shook with repressed fury as he said to the operator, "Get me the D. A."

"I can't stop Denton," he said over his shoulder, "but I can hold him up for a while, Susan. Maybe the D. A. doesn't believe there's an Erdtmann, but this is something different. I'll have an injunction clapped on Denton. Legally, he doesn't inherit till Keith's will is probated. Meanwhile I'll tie him up as tight as I can, and give Washington a chance to move in."

He gave swift orders into the televisior. Presently he shut it off and nodded reassuringly at Susan. "That's fixed, for a while. It's up to Washington now. . . ."

Carruthers rose from his seat. "You haven't had anything but coffee since last night, Bob. Come along. You too, Susan. We can plan while we eat."

Blake was conscious of an emptiness in his stomach. "Good idea," he said. . . .

THE big restaurant was crowded. They found seats, however, and ate heartily. After a time Blake paused with his fork halfway to his mouth.

"Funny," he said, listening intently.

"What?"

"Don't you hear it? Somebody's whistling *Lock Lomond*."

"What of it?" Carruthers asked, adjusting his monocle. Blake pushed back his chair, conscious of a mounting tension within him.

"Keith used to whistle *Lock Lomond* just like that. With those funny little trills—*look out!*"

There was a flash of gleaming light. A knife rose from the table, hesitated in mid-air, and then sped forward. Blake hurled himself backward, going down with a crash in the ruins of his chair. He felt a heavy weight smash on his body. Desperately he shouted, "Andy!"

Carruthers dived across the table. Blake struggled to free himself from the muscular, feathery body that oppressed him. His hands were burning with the hot fires of hell as the Erdtmann's vitriolic body-fluids ate into his skin. Carruthers swung a vicious, sledgehammer blow that halted suddenly in empty air. The invisible Erdtmann made a harsh grunting sound—and was gone.

"Vardu!" Susan cried. "It's Vardu!"

Questioning faces were turned toward the group. Suddenly a chair rose and flew at Blake, who was scrambling to his feet. He dodged it. The table was overturned; plates and service shattered and crashed.

Blake snatched up a knife and stood staring around, every muscle tense. Good God! How could he cope with this invisible savage—this horror who might spring upon him unawares at any moment? The Erdtmann might be behind him even now, with murderous talons tensed to strike.

There was a small puddle of spilled coffee on the carpet, and both Carruthers and Blake, at the same moment, saw a footprint appear near the spot—three-toed, bird-like prints. They moved toward Blake.

The two men jumped forward at the betraying marks. The Erdtmann toppled under the impact. All around diners were rising in startled amazement from their tables. Susan was hovering near by, a steak-knife clutched in her hand.

It was difficult to hold the sleek, feathery body that seemed to burn the skin like fire. Vardu slipped free and was gone. The next moment a window burst open, and soft footsteps died away.

Carruthers rose, dusting himself and replacing his monocle. "It looks like our friend's after your scalp, Bob," he said grimly.

Blake nodded. "Yeah . . . there's some angles I can't quite figure out. Why should he concentrate on me? And his whistling *Lock Lomond* the way Keith did—"

"Keith made friends with him for a while, Denton said."

"I know. That's why I think I've got a hunch. Listen, Andy, we can't let that devil roam loose around here. There'd be murder sooner or later. Go phone Inspector Donovan and ask him to bring as many men as he can. I'm going to set a trap for Vardu."

He did not need to mention the nature of the bait.

For Blake himself would be the bait to draw the invisible Erdtmann into the trap. . . .

LUCKILY, Transplanet Newsreels was a competent company, and its resources were immediately available. Within half an hour a studio was prepared. Blake, Carruthers, Susan, and Inspector Donovan entered it, followed by a dozen competent-looking officers.

"You're taking a long chance, Blake," Donovan said, letting his hand touch the heavy service-pistol at his belt. "This creature may kill you before we can do a thing."

"It's the only way. I can't let Vardu roam around loose. Put those lamps here." Blake turned to superintend the placing of a battery of portable, odd-looking lights that stood on wheeled tripods. Cords trailed from them.

"What are those for?" Donovan asked.

"Ultra-violet lamps," Blake explained. "Vardu's invisible in normal light, but a faster light-vibration might hit him."

He peered up into the shadowy depths of the ceiling. "Got those cameras ready?" An answer floated back. "Good. . . . You see, Donovan, even if the ultra-violet lamps don't work, the cameras may catch Vardu on specially sensitized film. I'm trying to plug all the loopholes. Like these nets." Each of the officers was carrying a net of strong wire-mesh.

"I hope you know what you're doing," Donovan muttered.

Blake nodded with a reassurance he didn't feel. There was a sick, cold emptiness in his stomach. This wasn't pleasant, being the live bait for an invisible killer who could strike from nowhere. . . .

"All set," he said evenly. "When I give the word, close the doors and make sure they stay shut. And turn on the ultra-violet lamps at the same time."

Carruthers' round face was drawn with anxiety. "Listen, Bob," he said abruptly. "Let me stay with you. Back to back, both of us will have a better chance—"

"No. Vardu might not show up unless I'm unarmed and alone. Wait till he walks into the trap, Andy." Blake gripped the little man's hand and squeezed it hard. "Thanks anyway."

Without a word Carruthers turned away, his lips thin and whitened with strain. Blake picked up a box of corn-flakes, used for snow scenes, and sprinkled them in inwardly spiraling lines, till he stood in the center. "All set," he called.

The doors were opened. The officers withdrew from sight. The huge sound-stage seemed deserted. Far overhead the rafters and platforms were bleak shadows in the diffused light. A moving camera-crane was a grotesque, angular monster near by. The sunlight that crept in through the doorways made cubistic patterns on the soundproof floor.

Blake stood motionless. Determinedly he fixed his gaze on the floor and tried to make his mind blank.

Every sense was keenly alert. When Vardu came, the imitation snow would crackle betrayingly, and there would be a chance to brace himself before the monster sprang. . . .

Blake cursed silently. Such thoughts were dangerous. Already his nerves were jolting in the dead stillness. He fought down an impulse to call out to the others, to reassure himself that they were still there, ready to lend their aid. Try and relax. Breathe naturally, slowly, deeply . . . but in spite of himself Blake found himself breathing in shallow gasps. He was perspiring, he realized.

Calm down. Relax. Think of something else. . . . What was that?

The faintest of cracklings . . . imagination. But imagination does not leave taloned footprints in the pseudo-snow!

"Now!" Blake shouted, and sprang aside. He was too late. A muscular body smashed against him, and he was hurled back, to crash down on the floor. His hands groped for and found a feathery hide beneath which giant muscles surged and rolled. The doors rolled shut with clanging thunder.

Midnight black blanketed the sound-stage. Then, abruptly, the ultra-violet lamps flared—invisibly. They shed no light. But the body of Vardu sprang out in shimmering brilliance!

Nothing else could be seen. Against a curtain of inky darkness the alien form was outlined, shimmering with radiance. Blake found himself staring up at a curious, owl-like face, with saucer eyes and a fleshy, soft beak. Ear-tufts stood up on the misshapen head.

Little glistening droplets gleamed on the monster's feathers—the vitriolic enzyme that could eat away solid rock. Blake gasped in sudden agony as the deadly secretion bit through his clothing and sent flaming daggers ripping into his flesh. Frantically he tried to hurl the Erdtmann away.

The fleshy beak gaped. The saucer eyes stared blankly. The mighty forearms squeezed Blake's torso till his ribs cracked. Helpless, he could only kick up at the monster with his knees, and that did no good.

FOOTSTEPS came drumming across the floor, crunching in the artificial snow. Carruthers' voice said hoarsely, "Hold him, Bob!" and the Erdtmann's stifling weight was flung aside. His middle portion seemed to vanish as Carruthers came between Blake and Vardu. Weird conflict of black shadows with a shining horror that could be seen only in the dark!

Carruthers tried to fling his wire-mesh net, but Vardu sprang away. He stood as though waiting, the feathery head swaying slowly to and fro. Blake stared.

The Erdtmann's body was anthropoid, but covered with those shining soft feathers that rippled as he breathed. His arms were singularly human, like his hands, though the latter were scaled and clawed. The short, crooked legs were bird-like, ending in mighty

talons. And the owl-like head, with its domed brain-case, indicated that Vardu was not a beast—he must be intelligent. Blake noticed something dark half-concealed among the feathers of the creature's neck.

He had no time to look closely at it. The Erdtmann sprang. Again Blake and Carruthers were at death grips with this alien terror whose very body burned like fire at the touch.

Other footsteps sounded; the officers closed in, Donovan at their head. But Vardu was incredibly strong. Nor was it easy to hold him, for the strength of his enzymic secretions seemed to have been increased by his activity. Blake's hands were raw, flaming masses of seared flesh. His breath rasping and whistling in his throat, he fought on. . . .

"Don't use your guns!" the bull voice of Donovan roared. "You can't see to aim in the dark!"

But, suddenly, the black silhouette of a hand and pistol were outlined against the Erdtmann's feathery body. The weapon snarled. Vardu let out a shrill, piercing cry. His taloned hands went to the wound.

Only for a moment was the Erdtmann off his guard, but the distraction turned the tide. A wire-mesh net was whipped around Vardu, and then another. Frantically he fought and strained. But now he had no chance.

Finally he lay on the floor, only his head free, arms bound to his sides, wrapped in nets that were visible only as meshes of blackness against the feathery, shining form. Tying the last knot, Blake drew back.

"There he is," he said hoarsely.

The Erdtmann stared up, no expression in the yellow, saucer eyes. Again Blake's attention was caught by the dark object about the monster's throat. Swiftly he leaned down and deftly drew it over Vardu's head.

A heavy metal case, already prepared, lay near by. At Blake's command, the Erdtmann was lifted and lowered inside. The lid was closed.

"He'll do," Carruthers said, snapping the padlock. "He can breathe through the air-holes, and he can't get out. Let's have some light, now."

The ultra-violet lamps were switched off, and the doors opened. The group regarded each other ruefully.

Every man was in rags. All had suffered from the contact with Vardu's poisonous body-secretion. But Blake was almost out on his feet. He was nearly naked from the waist up, and his chest was seared and reddened as though with fire. His hands were puffy and crimson, already blistering. But there was a light of triumph in his eyes as he held aloft the ring he had taken from Vardu's neck. It was made of dull black metal.

"A reel!" Carruthers' voice was excited.

"Right! Maybe close contact with Vardu made it invisible till now—it was under his feathers. Look at that case, Andy. The metal's been almost eaten through, and it's durium at that. I guess the Erdtmann can reduce any metallic ore. . . ." Blake went unsteadily toward the door, trailed by the others.

"There's film in this, if it isn't ruined. Come on! Let's head for a projection room."

AT the door they were met by Joe Denton. His face was scarlet with mortified anger.

"You, Blake!" he snapped. "I've come to find out why you had the Borer seized by the authorities. What—"

Blake opened the door of the projection room. "Come inside, Denton. And the rest of you."

Denton hesitated, glanced around, and sullenly obeyed. Susan, Carruthers, Inspector Donovan, and his men followed, finding seats in the miniature theatre. Instead of the usual seats, there were long rows of padded benches. Blake gave the ring of film to Carruthers.

"Take it up to the booth and run it," he requested. "It seems to be okay—though we can't be sure till we try."

Despite the burning pain of his injuries, and his weakness, Blake felt a sense of strong excitement as he found a seat and waited.

On the screen at the end of the room a vague image grew. It flickered and faded, and grew once more distinct. The wire film was injured, then. Blake pulled nervously at his lower lip. Was the whole reel useless?

No! The face of Doctor Keith sprang out on the screen, against a background of gray fog and rock wall. The scientist's voice grew from a low crackling into clear audibility.

"... not much time. I just managed to..." The face of Keith faded on the screen, and the voice died away. Then both were clear again. "... out of the ship with the camera. Lucky there was a built-in microphone in it—"

Light flooded the theatre as the door burst open. One of Donovan's officers stood framed on the threshold. He was holding one of the ultra-violet lamps on his tripod, and his other hand gripped a pistol.

"He's loose!" the officer blurted. "He got out—"

Donovan sprang up. "Who? Vardu?"

"Yes. He—" The man halted as Blake plunged past him to slam shut the door. "The—the box he was in just seemed to crumble apart. He was out before we knew it. I think I put a bullet in him, but—"

"Where is he now?" Blake snapped.

The man shook his head. "We lost him when he got out of the sound-stage. I thought he might head for you, Mr. Blake, so I brought along one of those lamps."

"Good work," Blake nodded, plugging the cord into a socket and swinging the lens so that it focused over a wide area in the little room. "I've been a damned fool, Donovan. If Vardu can dissolve durium ore with his body secretions, he can do the same thing with a metal box or mesh nets." Blake sat down suddenly, sick with realization of what this meant. Vardu would not fall twice into the same trap. And the moment Blake emerged from the theatre, invisible death

would stalk him as before. No one would be safe. Despite the painful heat of his burns, Blake's back-bone felt like ice.

Even now, death might be behind him, waiting just outside the door. . . .

He came to a decision. "Start the film again, Andy," he called up. There might be some clue in the record Keith had left. It was a forlorn hope—but there was none other.

AT Donovan's command, two burly officers put their backs against the door. In the dimness the others returned to their seats. But this time there was an air of ominous tension, and the quiet had something macabre about it.

Once more the film began to unwind. On the screen Keith's face grew.

"... Lucky there was a built-in microphone in it... I'm going to give this reel to Vardu when I'm through, and tell him to find Bob Blake and give it to him. I think Bob will come after me, though I told him not to risk it."

At first Blake did not realize the significance of this. Then his jaw dropped, and he blinked uncomprehendingly at the screen.

The voice of Keith went on, "I've got to talk fast. I'm in an underground cavern now, and Joe—Joseph Denton, my nephew—is in the Borer. He's trying to kill me—"

Someone cried out. One of the officers at the door cursed, and flung his arms around a wiry figure that tried frantically to wriggle free. For a moment there was confusion.

Donovan took instant charge. "Stay where you are!" he shouted, and lumbered toward the door, followed by two of his men. There was the sound of a scuffle.

Then Joseph Denton was being led back to his seat on the last bench. He was sullenly silent now, and did not resist when two burly officers sat down on either side of him, guns ready in their hands.

"All right," Donovan's quiet voice said. "He's unarmed—now. See that he stays where he is, boys, till the picture's finished."

In the silence Blake felt his heart hammering. The mystery was being explained. But there were still enigmas—

In his booth Carruthers started the film again.

"... trying to kill me. He's already tried once, and failed. But I'm unarmed... Joe has been negotiating with some foreign power to buy the Borer. He's just told me that. He knows I can't escape. He's told me his plans—gloating, the devil! He can't operate the Borer, but, after he's disposed of me, he's going to radio Bob Blake to come down after him. He'll have a perfect alibi—he hopes. But Vardu's invisible, and I'll see that he gives this film to Blake. If I can make him understand. He and his tribe are like children—though they're friendly enough. I've tried to get them to help me capture Joe, but they're

afraid. Only Vardu has any courage. He's got the idea that all humans are murderers like Joe. And—" Keith seemed to hesitate. "He's so damned stupid! I shouldn't have tried to enlist his help against Joe. The fool thinks I want him to kill Blake, too. But I'll straighten him out on that—"

"I see," Blake grunted. "Only Vardu didn't quite understand!"

As though in answer, the eerie voice went on, "I've taught Vardu a little English. If anything goes wrong, Boh, let him watch this film and listen to it. Vardu! Boh Blake is a friend! Do you understand? You must not harm him! . . . That should do it. . . ." The gaunt old face on the screen twisted with grief. "I'm doomed, I'm afraid. Joe will kill me eventually. But I've made an important discovery. This cavern is filled with durium ore. Durium is very valuable, but it costs more than it's worth to extract the pure metal. But the Erdtmann can do that—the enzyme their bodies secrete breaks down the ore so that durium can be easily extracted. The Erdtmann can be trained to do that, and, too, I think their specialized enzyme can be analyzed and duplicated. That means there's a fortune in this cavern. As discoverer, I imagine I own it. If so, this is my last will and testament, and I leave this cave, with its treasure of durium, to my niece, Susan Morley.

"I wish to bequeath this to Susan, because she may not inherit the Borer. I realize now that it is a powerful war weapon. Therefore the Borer, and its plans, must be given freely to the United States of America, to be used if necessary in the case of foreign invasion—which I hope and pray will never occur!"

The screen went dark. No one moved for an instant. Then, very softly, Blake whispered, "Donovan . . . turn on the light."

Instantly the Inspector caught his meaning. He reached out toward the ultra-violet lamp and pressed the switch. The invisible ray swept the room.

Blake whirled. Had he been wrong? Had that soft, curious rustling meant nothing? Or had it been the sound of feathers rubbing against one another?

Beside Blake sat Donovan; on his other hand sat Susan. The officers were standing against the walls, save for two who flanked Denton where he sat on the last bench. Nothing else was visible in the small, bare room . . .

And then Blake saw. Towering above Denton, bent in a half-crouch behind the man, was—

Vardu!

THE huge, alien figure loomed there like a colossus.

The weird face was a mask of sheer horror, for part of it had been shot away. The yellowish blood stained the feathery pelt. Like some gigantic bird of prey the Erdtmann hovered—

"Stop him!" Donovan roared. He flung himself forward—too late.

The monster swooped. His body seemed to dart down and enfold Denton. The mighty, taloned arms

wrapped about the killer's waist. Denton was hugged in a crushing embrace to Vardu's form.

The room exploded into a blinding blur of action. The officers leaped toward Vardu, straining to pull him from his victim. Their efforts were useless. The Erdtmann clung doggedly, while the frightful screams of Denton rose to an ear-piercing crescendo—and stopped.

Only then did Vardu's great-thewed arms relax. He allowed Denton to be pulled from his grip. But at sight of that limp figure Susan gave a sick little cry and turned hastily away.

He was dead. And the manner of his dying was dreadfully evident. His clothing, his skin, and most of his flesh had been eaten away by the rock-devouring enzyme that covered Vardu's body . . .

The Erdtmann lay quietly beside his victim. His saucer eyes were no longer afire with murder-lust. His fleshy beak moved, and a curiously husky voice whispered, "Me—me friend."

Blake pushed past Donovan and stood staring down at Vardu. He said through dry lips, "Friend. Yes. Friend, Vardu."

The feathered head rolled slightly; blood trickled slowly to the carpet, fluorescent in the ultra-violet light that made the Erdtmann visible. He went on haltingly:

"Me—see picture. Picture say you friend. Me not understand before. You—not hurt me?"

Weakly Vardu raised his taloned claw in a poignantly human gesture. Without hesitation Blake gripped it in his hand, scarcely feeling the pain from his burned skin.

"Friend," he said softly. "Not hurt you. Friend, Vardu."

"Be careful," Donovan urged in an undertone. "He may be dangerous yet."

There was no mirth in Blake's smile. He glanced at the Inspector.

"Vardu is dying," he said. "Can't you see that? Our bullets didn't all miss . . ."

The Erdtmann raised his other talon and groped in empty air. Suddenly Susan was standing beside Blake. She put her soft small hand into Vardu's claw.

"Friend . . ." the alien being whispered—and gently withdrew its talons from the humans' grasp. The yellow eyes filmed. With a sudden, convulsive movement Vardu wrenched his body over; a shudder shook him. Then he lay quite still. He was dead.

There was a brief silence. Donovan shook his head slowly, and slipped the gun back into his pocket.

Susan's hand crept into Blake's, and his fingers tightened over her small ones. The girl murmured, "Poor Vardu." There were tears shining in her eyes.

Blake found it difficult to swallow. His throat was very dry. . . .

"Yes," he said gently. "Poor Vardu. The cards were stacked against him from the first. Vardu never had a chance against—humans. He—he didn't quite understand."

»»» Introducing ««« THE AUTHOR

MILTON KALETSKY

Author of

THE WIZARD OF BASEBALL

SO you want me to break down and confess all. Well, when I came into this world from another plane of existence, in 1915, Europe was at war, as usual. But they weren't fighting over me. They aren't fighting over me today either. Isn't it great to know one thing they're not fighting about? They seem to be quarreling about everything else though.

Just to show what a peaceable guy I am, I've had only three fist fights in my whole life. Won one, lost one and drew the third. Nowadays I do my fighting with words.

Time came when I had to go to school. This was fun, for me, not for the teachers. I used to spend my school days doing two things: either standing in corners with my face to the wall, or else staying in after school to write "I will not talk in class" 500 times.

Standing in corners wasn't bad at all. Gave me a chance to amuse myself by drawing pictures and carving my name on the walls, while the other kids—poor devils—had to pay attention to the teacher.

But writing "I will not talk in class" wasn't so good. In fact, it got me into trouble one day. The teacher asked me a question and I didn't answer. She repeated the question and again I didn't answer. So off to the principal's office she dragged me.

When we got there, the principal looked at me with stern dignity and said, "Harrumph! Well, young man, why won't you answer your teacher?"

And I said, "Hell, Mister, she keeps telling me not to talk in class, so how can I answer the question—by sign language or something?"

What? You want to know what's funny about that story? Well, heh, to tell the truth, I don't know. I just told it in case you saw something funny in it, you'd tell me.

Anyway, when I got out of school, I calculated I'd written "I will not talk in class" eight million times. Well, all right, I won't exaggerate . . . seven and a half million.

Once upon a time I intended to be a doctor. But Fate put her nose into my affairs and landed me in a hospital as a patient, not as a doctor. The sawbones had a grand time tying my insides into knots. No sooner had they sewed me up than they had to rip the stitches again to untangle the knots and remove a few things they'd left inside, such as four pairs of rubber gloves, three scalpels, a tank of chloroform, a copy of *AMAZING STORIES* and a telephone directory. Oh, you don't believe it. Neither do I.

That's enough about my operation. I could fill this magazine with descriptions of my symptoms, but I'd better not.

This is supposed to be a magazine of entertainment.

While recovering from these operations, however, I got acquainted with *AMAZING STORIES* and wrote my first science fiction story. The less said about that, the better. As soon as it was finished, I fed it to the furnace. R.I.P.

College beckoned. In a total of six and a half years, I learned a mess of physics, mathematics and assorted other junk, collected a couple of degrees; spent a hectic year as editor of the *College Humor* magazine during which time I had to try to make \$300 pay for \$500 worth of printing each month, and did it too. (Maybe they ought to make me Secretary of the Treasury.)

At present, I amuse myself and annoy the editors by writing stories and articles. Also I'm trying to join the United States Weather Bureau, since I am an amateur meteorologist. Twenty years from now, whenever the newspapers predict "Fair" and you get soaked, blame me.

Somewhere on this page, you'll find my picture. It's guaranteed to be the best thing for scaring babies. If it doesn't work satisfactorily, return it to me and your money will not be cheerfully refunded.

The editor of this magazine asked me to tell all about myself in 750 words. Here I've written only 600 and can't think of another thing to say. Well, let's see. . . I don't like Hedy Lamarr. That's fair enough, because probably she doesn't like me. I don't like Shirley Temple either, but she isn't getting any gray hairs over that. What do I like? Well,

I like coffee,

I like tea,

I like the girls,

And the girls (sometimes) like me.

And don't you think I've said enough? So long!—Milton Kaletsky, New York, New York.

(Editorial note: Mr. Kaletsky was persuaded to return to science fiction writing by author's agent, Julius Schwartz, of New York, who convinced him, and not without reason, that he had a lot of ability along these lines. So, your editors received in all, four short stories as a result in the past few weeks, and of these four, three were accepted. His first, published in *Amazing Stories* in April, received a great deal of favorable comment, and his second, presented here, we believe you will find really enjoyable.

Mr. Kaletsky will be with us often, we are certain, and we fully expect him to do some of the better off-trail yarns of the next few years. He impresses your editors as a man who will bear watching.

And you can take it from us, that's a prediction we'll be glad to put on the record!)



Milton Kaletsky

Quiz Page

THE following quiz has been prepared as a pleasant means of testing your knowledge of things fantastic and scientific. We offer it solely for the pleasure it gives you, and with the hope that it will provide you with many bits of information that will help you to enjoy the stories in this magazine.

Here's the yardstick for measuring your mental capacity which is being tested by this quiz.

Count three points for each correct answer. If you get between 55 and 70 points, you won't have to take up nursery rhymes for intellectual enjoyment. 70 to 85 points merits you a slight pat on the back. 85 to 100 points, and you'd be a suitable companion for Isaac Newton. Get over a hundred points and we'll suspect you of cheating.

AN ICEMAN'S PICK

1. Sir William Herschel is noted for:
 - (a) The discovery of a new anti-freeze gasoline.
 - (b) The discovery of the motion of the sun.
 - (c) The discovery of the interferometer.
2. A catalyst is:
 - (a) A tartrate used in cake baking.
 - (b) A substance which effects a chemical reaction but does not enter into it.
 - (c) A meteor which recently struck the earth.
3. A neuron is:
 - (a) A nerve cell with its axons and dendrites.
 - (b) A person who uses snuff.
 - (c) A positive charged electron.
4. If you saw a corolla you'd know it was:
 - (a) The petals of a flower.
 - (b) A bagpipe.
 - (c) An instrument used in trisecting an angle.
5. If you were a ditch digger you'd know bumus is:
 - (a) A constellation.
 - (b) A humorous joke.
 - (c) Decayed organic material.
6. If you ever were in the United States Army and worked K.P. duty you should know that sodium hydrogen carbonate is:
 - (a) Laughing gas.
 - (b) Baking soda.
 - (c) The stuff that makes Mexican jumping beans jump.
7. If you are not anemic you should know the word Leucocytes refers to:
 - (a) Red blood corpuscles.
 - (b) White blood corpuscles.
 - (c) Lew Lehr's stepfather.
8. Fraunhofer lines are:
 - (a) Parallel lines that do not meet.
 - (b) Dark lines across the sun's spectrum.
 - (c) Lines on which laundry is hung.
9. A college cheerleader knows the tracbea is:
 - (a) Another word for railroad tracks.
 - (b) The windpipe.
 - (c) An instrument to blow glass.
10. Medulla Oblongata is another term for:
 - (a) The lower part of the brain.

- (b) An unknown route to India.
- (c) The long hollow tooth of a snake.

BLANK(ET) STATEMENTS

The following statements describe a certain element. Can you fill the blank with a word that will make the statements correct?

It is an element. Its atomic weight is 6 and the is the purest of its kind found in South Africa and Brazil. They are separated from the rock in which they are found by weathering. The unit by which they are sold is called the The largest known specimen, the, weighed 3032 before being cut. They can be produced synthetically when molten iron containing dissolved is suddenly

A BOX OF MATCHING QUESTIONS

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 1. Retina. | (a) Upper part of the pistil of a flower. |
| 2. Stigma. | (b) The inner coat of the eye which is sensitive to light and on which the image falls. |
| 3. Zygote. | (c) Spores formed by the union of two gametes. |
| 4. Haber process. | (d) A small wavy structure extending into the small intestines which increases the absorbing power. |
| 5. Villi. | (e) Production of ammonia gas by the combination of nitrogen and hydrogen. |
| 6. Kaolin. | (f) A device to measure the velocity of the wind. |
| 7. Vena Cava. | (g) Hydrated aluminum silicate. |
| 8. Anemometer. | (h) The main vein carrying blood from posterior half of the body to the heart. |
| 9. Paleontologist. | (i) A person who studies the fossil record of life. |
| 10. Anabolism. | (j) The process of building up new cells and tissues from food. |

SCIENCE JUNGLE

Each word is a scientific term. Can you unscramble it?

1. Sag, Gala, Nus
2. Mnoo, Cadi, Geg
3. Esurn, Lroleac, Endditres
4. Rtaery, Htgil, Daron
5. Ronde, Suodn, Cocusc
6. Teroxc, Aorif, Ologcey
7. Xygoen, Uvole, Eunnor
8. Gnaro, Mylbp, Gamgot
9. Epalt, Papu, Htp
10. Lsavia, Mpers, Pesals
11. Uera, Livil, Vuris
12. Gyzteo, Htraox, Eniv
13. Znove, Mitrax, Utornen
14. Sohpgnee, Yarno, Toorpn
15. Cesrpta, Estel, Calt

(Answers on page 94)

READER'S PAGE

FIRST TIME????

Sirs:

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is the most enjoyable magazine on the market. I have read every story that appeared in it from the first issue and enjoyed each one. The most outstanding achievement to your credit was obtaining Burroughs' story for your second edition. This is the first time, to my knowledge, that E. Rief Burroughs appeared in a science fiction magazine. I am eagerly waiting for his next story. The less science in the stories the better I'll like the magazine, but this does not excuse you from keeping the stories within the realm of possibility.

D. Roland,
550 W. 170th St.,
New York City.

We are afraid you are wrong about Burroughs. He's appeared many times in *Amazing Stories*. For instance, "At the Earth's Core," "The Master Mind of Mars," etc., etc. And *Amazing Stories* is our sister science fiction magazine. You can be sure that when Burroughs writes another John Carter story, we'll be considering our readers and giving the manuscript the once-over.—Ed.

A CONTEST WINNER TELLS HOW

Sirs:

No, I wasn't guessing when I listed the stories in regard to merit in exactly the same order in which they came in the magazine. "The Robot Peril" was first because it had well-drawn characters and was well-written. The ideas and story were not novel or startlingly new, but they were presented in a refreshing style. The really only original thing: threatening to become rivals of the robots as servants. However, a story does not have to be entirely new. The greatest artists don't always create something original; they improve on existing things. All this stumbling about is really just to try to get over the idea that your stories don't have to be new in ideas, but they have to be new in presentation.

"Death Over Chicago," "The Time Merchant," and "Captives of the Void" were all quite interesting, and readable but none was outstanding. "Death Over Chicago" owed its position mostly to the same fact, which I wrote about above. It was well-presented. "The Time Merchant" was very clearly presented. "Captives of the Void" was novel, but to be quite frank, I don't understand how the two beings and the ship outlived the rest of the universe (by the way, more explanation should have been given to show the three people skipped a century and a half in "The Robot Peril").

"Hell in Eden" was below average, but not a hopeless case. The drawing looked as if it was in the wrong magazine.

I never want to see such utter rot as "The Gift of Magic" in FANTASTIC again. It was too horrible for words. After all there should be some limits to your fantasy.

Dave Skitt,
581 William St.,
London, Ontario, Canada.

Your editors certainly don't agree. Fantasy has no limits, beyond imagination.—Ed.

IDEAL FOR IMAGINATION AND ADVENTURE

Sirs:

I am only fifteen years old. However, for the past two years my ambition has been to write fiction. In my leisure I have composed a few short stories which have met with the respective compliments of my relatives, friends and teachers. But, how I envy those men

who have the power and ability to express their thoughts and imaginations in such marvelous, telepathic vocabularies, i.e., Phil Nowlan, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Eando Binder.

I can only hope and pray that during the course of future years I may gain possession of this wonderful gift.

Allow me to fulfill my foremost intention and compliment you on your publication, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES. It is, I believe, the ideal magazine for anyone who has imagination and favors adventure.

Robert E. Doherty,
90 Grove Street,
Fall River, Mass.

We certainly hope that you do gain the "gift" of writing, but let us warn you right now it isn't so much a gift as just plain hard work. Keep on trying. And thank for your comment. You've certainly expressed the purpose of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES.—Ed.

PREFERS INSECT STORIES

Sirs:

I have finished reading the November issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES and I choose "Into Another Dimension" by Maurice Ducloux as the best story, as I prefer insect or animal stories and how they would act in ruling the world. I hope to see more stories by the same author.

John W. Smith,
Stony Creek, N. Y.

EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF

Sirs:

It's about time an "old-timer" got after your "remarks-from-the-readers" department and really took the boys down a notch! I am speaking at present of some of the remarks, for sometimes I wonder if the readers don't get a little hasty when they blow off. But, every man for himself, and I'll start in right now!

First, your magazine is O.K., but if you ever print another story in two parts without warning me first, I'm going to burn the darn thing up and never buy another! Oh I'll admit you did in the Table of Contents, but I never look at that. The best way to judge a story is by the way it is presented in the book itself, and when I got to the place where it went, "be sure and follow the thrilling adven—" Continued next month!!! Was I sore!!!

Then in your co-mag., *Amazing Stories*, in "Black World," there was absolutely no warning what-so-ever!! Well all right, chop, chop.

Your artists are O.K., too, and don't you let anyone tell you different. I do wish Bob Fugua wouldn't be quite so "Fantastic," and give us some rocket ships and special scenery. Frank R. Paul, I wish, would keep up his good work, and try a hand at something realistic in his spare time.

I'll put you on the back if you will promise to start some of the boys on a new department. I have waited in vain for some science mag. to start it, and as you are the first I've ever written to, I'll give you the job!

I'd like to see a department that gives something real, something true. It's this business of measuring stars and planets, and dealing with cosmic distances. How about some article on telescopes, spectroscopes, etc., and their uses? I'd like to see it done in black and white and so I can really believe it for myself.

Edward Robison,
1155 Austin Street,
Wellboro, Penna.

Well, how about it, readers, do you want fast articles of this type? —Ed. (Continued on page 89)

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CITY & STATE

and in a second two thousand sane people turned into two thousand screeching, pummeling, kicking, hair-pulling, eye-gouging maniacs, battling to relieve their wild feelings over that remarkable baseball and its crazy antics.

THE morning of July Fifth was clear and bright, except in the office of the Hawkinsville Hawks. There it was thundering. The thunder was Manager Joey Ricks having a calm, quiet talk.

"Didja read these here letters?" he howled, waving a sheaf of papers in Lefty's face. "The other teams in the league ain't gonna play us again till we get rid of yuh."

Lefty sprawled nonchalantly over a chair. "So what? If they won't play us, we win every game by default."

"Oh, yeah?" snarled Ricks. "Wipe that goofy grin off that accident yuh call yer face. Here's a telegram from the league commissioner suspendin' yuh fer queerin' the game! An' what's more, the Big Shot is in the next room waitin' to see yuh. Brother, what he'll tell yuh'll fry yer ears right offen yer head! Yuh'll never get into the big leagues now, I'll promise yu that! I warned yuh, during the game, the Big Shot wants dependable, steady, *same* ballplayers. Baseball is just like business. Yuh can't cut no crazy diodes an' . . ."

Lefty jumped up. "The Big Shot is there—and you keep me waitin'?" he demanded. "I coulda had a contract signed by now . . ."

Striding to the door that led to the inner sanctum, he swept past the gaping Ricks, who was purpling and paling by turns.

"Yuh insane idiot . . ." Ricks gasped, then choked into silence as Lefty tore the door open and crossed the threshold.

The Big Shot looked up from his desk. "Oh, good morning, Mr. Lopez. I just called you into inform you that I've advised Mr. Ricks to make our your final pay check with the Hawks . . ."

Lefty advanced and placed his palms familiarly on the desk top.

"Exactly," he agreed, fixing a piercing stare upon the bewildered, flustered face before him. "I was just going to suggest it myself. This small-time stuff is no place for me. I'm just the man you need up there in the big circus . . ."

The Big Shot began to rise from his seat, spluttering, but he subsided suddenly as Lefty went on smoothly, his stare meeting The Mogul's with what seemed actual impact.

"What you need up there is a little less ordinary business, and a little more real brilliance—an' . . ." Lefty's voice took on a convincing note. " . . . a little more will power. Will power, that's what does it. A pitcher what uses will power, plus brains, plus originality— But what's the purpose of us wastin' your valuable time?"

"Just slap down one of them there five-year contracts, an' I'll sign it right now. I ain't no man to quibble. You need me, an' I need you. Of course, I got the right to request different salary adjustments from time to time . . ."

The Big Shot nodded vigorously, and his face became wreathed in smiles of agreement.

"Exactly," he agreed enthusiastically, fishing into his inside pocket. "I have a contract right here, and if I may hope so, I'd like to include an option for another five-year term when this is up. You see," he grinned expansively, "I wouldn't want to win five pennants, and then see you go somewhere else and take five pennants away from the Leopards . . ."

"Sure thing," said Lefty. "I ain't no change-coat. I'll stick, just as long as I get a square deal, an' I ain't worried about that with you around . . ."

With a flourish he affixed his signature to a contract, got the Big Shot's ink-spattered scrawl on record, and then, with a breezy wave of his hand, marched out.

He waved the contract airily at Ricks, whose eyes were popping.

"Ten years," he said nonchalantly: "Nothing to it. Yuh just gotta use will power, that's all."

Gasping like a fish out of water, Ricks waved a fumbling hand in search of something on his desk.

"Water!" he croaked. "Gimme water . . ." His clutching fingers found the inkwell . . .

"Will power," repeated Lefty Lopez, slamming the door behind him on his way out. "An' will I show the big boys how to win pennants . . . I!"



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See Page 95



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LIFE ON IO

(Moon of Jupiter)

By HENRY GADE

(See back cover painting by Frank R. Paul)

On our back cover this month we present the artist's conception of the inhabitants of Io, Jupiter's Moon, deduced in imagination from scientific facts about that world as astronomers know them

IO is one of the four largest satellites of Jupiter, and quite as capable of supporting living creatures as any of the planets of the solar system. Io is the nearest to its parent body, being only 261,800 miles away (or very nearly the same distance at which our own moon circles our own planet).

Satellite five, which is only 100 miles in diameter, is closer, but is no more than a barren chunk of rock, and not to be included in our category of inhabitable worlds.

Io has a sidereal period of 1 day, 18 hours, 27 minutes, 33.51 seconds. Its inclination to Jupiter is 3 degrees, 6.7 seconds, and its eccentricity is zero. In diameter it is 2,109 miles, or slightly smaller than Luna, with a gravity slightly less than that of our own moon. A man could jump perhaps 40 feet into the air with the same effort of a six-foot jump on earth.

In trying to analyze the possible life form on Io, we must take into consideration the youthfulness of the world, compared to our own satellite. Jupiter acts as a sun to Io, giving it more warmth than it receives from old Sol herself, too distant to have much influence.

Due to these double heating factors, the satellite has cooled more slowly, and while now being quite cold insofar as surface conditions are concerned, it is not likely to be a dead world as is Luna. It should possess an atmosphere, and its vegetation should be of the hardy desert type, possibly fruit-bearing cactus types.

The Red Spot of Jupiter is thought to be a radio-active area, and it is possible that the radiations from this source would tend to cause a rather advanced evolution of any life on Io. Thus we may assume the Ionian to be fairly well advanced scientifically—at least enough to allow him to wrest the greatest possible amount of food from his rather unfertile world.

First, with a radio-active source, his science has possibly found a way to utilize this free power to give him artificial heat, light, power, and aids to cultivation. Perhaps he has found a way to tap the energies of the Red Spot, and to store them for his own use. Thus, we may picture the Ionian landscape dotted here and there with radio power stations, absorbing the rays from Jupiter, and transforming them to the everyday uses of the Ionian.

And likely, too, is the existence of city-communities quite well advanced in science. The Ionian would tend, because of his intelligence, and because of the rigors of his world, to band together for mutual benefit. Perhaps he has a more or less socialistic sort of government which is quite stable due to the fact that absolute and permanent balance would be necessary to prevent disruption of the food supply, and of the civilization itself.

As to the Ionian himself, we can picture him as a very heavily furred individual, quite necessary to protect himself from the naturally rapid temperature changes of a world so small. It is extremely likely that the range of temperature between noon and night (these designations being in reference to Jupiter rather than the sun) would be from 60 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit, to 70 degrees above zero, the entire range being covered with great rapidity and regularity.

He would be a rather short, squat creature, light of bone, and thin and spare of body, although this would be hard to determine visually because of the extreme fluffiness of his fur coat.

His head, perhaps, would be protected by a shell-like covering, which would include a transparent covering for the eyes, in which would be a liquid to prevent freezing.

Hands and feet would be clawed, to aid him in climbing the towering cactus plants, and to pluck the fruits from them. Fingers and toes would be long and agile, and perhaps as dextrous as an Earthman's hand.

He would have a large lung capacity, capable of breathing a rarefied atmosphere.

An Earthman, visiting Io, would find himself an instant object of suspicion. Ionians would find that their own planetary system quite possibly supports four intelligent life forms, and each of them quite capable of developing scientifically enough to journey the void between, for purposes of adding to their supplies of food, livable space, etc. Thus, a visitor from the skies would be approached cautiously, no doubt well covered by whatever armament (more than likely of a radio-active nature in the form of a ray from the Red Spot power plants) of defense available.

However, it is also quite possible that the socialistic tendencies of these small worlds would extend even to inter-world exchange and trade. Thus, belligerence might not be expected.

The Earthman would find it impossible to survive without his space suit, and an artificial air supply. He would need weighted, lead shoes to avoid his greater muscular ability causing loss of control due to lighter gravity. He could find the level areas of the planet rare, and would need to be equipped as a mountain climber, to surmount cliffs and jagged formations.

Moisture, rainfall, etc., would be rare on Io, and clouds would be notable only by their absence. Weather changes would be a definite and predictable factor from day to day, and every action of the Ionian would be on a never-changing schedule.

Io would indeed be an interesting world to visit!

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LIFE ON IO

MOON of JUPITER

• Theoretically, creatures such as these might inhabit this satellite. Io has a diameter of 2000 miles and a thin, though breathable atmosphere. (Complete details on page 96.)

